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OUR VILLAGE.

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OUR VILLAGE:

SKETCHES

OF

RURAL CHARACTER AND SCENERY.

BY

MARY RUSSELL MITFORD,

AUTHOR OF JULIAN, A TRAGEDY.

LONDON:

G. AND W. B. WHITTAKER,

AVE-MARIA-LANE.

1824.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following pages contain an attempt to delineate country scenery and country manners, as they exist in a small village in the south of England. The writer may at least claim the merit of a hearty love of her subject, and of that local and personal familiarity, which only a long residence in one neighbourhood could have enabled her to attain. Her descriptions have always been written on the spot and at the moment, and in nearly every instance with the closest and most resolute fidelity to the place and the people. If she be accused of having given a brighter aspect to her villagers than is usually met with in books, she cannot help it, and would not if she could. She has painted, as they appeared to her, their little frailties and their many virtues, under an intense and thankful conviction, that in every condition of life goodness and happiness may be found by those who seek them, and

never more surely than in the fresh air, the shade, and the sunshine of nature.

A few sketches of character, in a somewhat higher rank, have been introduced; it is right also to add, that the greater part both of them and of the strictly rural papers have already appeared in a periodical publication.

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OUR VILLAGE.

OF all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me most delightful is a little village far in the country ; a small neighbourhood, not of fine mansions finely peopled, but of cottages and cottage-like houses, " messuages or tenements," as a friend of mine calls such ignoble and non-descript dwellings, with inhabitants whose faces are as familiar to us as the flowers in our garden ; a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship ; where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one, and authorised to hope that every one feels an interest in us. How pleasant it is to slide into these fine-hearted feelings from the kindly and unconscious influence of habit, and to learn to know and to love the people about us, with all their peculiarities, just as we learn to know and to love the nooks and turns of the shady lanes and sunny commons that we pass every day. Even in books I like a con-

finest locality, and so do the critics when they talk of the unities. Nothing is so tiresome as to be whirled half over Europe at the chariot-wheels of a hero, to go to sleep at Vienna, and awaken at Madrid; it produces a real fatigue, a weariness of spirit. On the other hand, nothing is so delightful as to sit down in a country village in one of Miss Austen's delicious novels, quite sure before we leave it to become intimate with every spot and every person it contains; or to ramble with Mr. White* over his own parish of Selborne, and form a friendship with the fields and coppices, as well as with the birds, mice, and squirrels, who inhabit them; or to sail with Robinson Crusoe to his island, and live there with him and his goats and his man Friday;—how much we dread any new comers, any fresh importation of savage or sailor! we never sympathise for a moment in our hero's want of company, and are quite grieved when he gets away;—or to be shipwrecked with Ferdinand on that other lovelier island—the island of Prospero, and Miranda, and Caliban, and Ariel, and nobody else, none of Dryden's exotic inventions;—that is best of all. And a small neighbourhood is as good in sober waking reality as in poetry or prose; a village neighbourhood, such as this

* White's Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne; one of the most fascinating books ever written. I wonder that no naturalist has adopted the same plan.

Berkshire hamlet in which I write, a long, straggling, winding street at the bottom of a fine eminence, with a road through it, always abounding in carts, horsemen, and carriages, and lately enlivened by a stage-coach from B—— to S——, which passed through about ten days ago, and will I suppose return some time or other. There are coaches of all varieties now-a-days; perhaps this may be intended for a monthly diligence, or a fortnightly fly. Will you walk with me through our village, courteous reader? The journey is not long. We will begin at the lower end, and proceed up the hill.

The tidy square red cottage on the right hand, with the long well-stocked garden by the side of the road, belongs to a retired publican from a neighbouring town; a substantial person with a comely wife; one who piques himself on independence and idleness, talks politics, reads newspapers, hates the minister, and cries out for reform. He introduced into our peaceful vicinage the rebellious innovation of an illumination on the queen's acquittal. Remonstrance and persuasion were in vain; he talked of liberty and broken windows—so we all lighted up. Oh! how he shone that night with candles and laurel, and white bows, and gold paper, and a transparency (originally designed for a pocket-handkerchief) with a flaming portrait of Her Majesty, hatted and feathered, in red ochre. He had no rival in

the village, that we all acknowledged; the very bonfire was less splendid; the little boys reserved their best crackers to be expended in his honour, and he gave them full sixpence more than any one else. He would like an illumination once a month; for it must not be concealed that, in spite of gardening, of newspaper reading, of jaunting about in his little cart, and frequenting both church and meeting, our worthy neighbour begins to feel the weariness of idleness. He hangs over his gate, and tries to entice passengers to stop and chat; he volunteers little jobs all round, smokes cherry-trees to cure the blight, and traces and blows up all the wasp-nests in the parish. I have seen a great many in our garden to-day, and shall enchant him with the intelligence. He even assists his wife in her sweepings and dustings. Poor man! he is a very respectable person, and would be a very happy one, if he would add a little employment to his dignity. It would be the salt of life to him.

Next to his house, though parted from it by another long garden with a yew arbour at the end, is the pretty dwelling of the shoemaker, a pale, sickly-looking, black-haired man, the very model of sober industry. There he sits in his little shop from early morning till late at night. An earthquake would hardly stir him: the illumination did not. He stuck immoveably to his last, from the first gradual lighting up, through the

long blaze and the gradual decay, till his large solitary candle was the only light in the place. One cannot conceive any thing more perfect than the contempt which the man of transparencies and the man of shoes must have felt for each other on that evening. There was at least as much vanity in the sturdy industry as in the strenuous idleness, for our shoemaker is a man of substance: he employs three journeymen, two lame, and one a dwarf, so that his shop looks like an hospital; he has purchased the lease of his commodious dwelling, some even say that he has bought it out and out; and he has only one pretty daughter, a light, delicate, fair-haired girl of fourteen, the champion, protectress, and playfellow of every brat under three years old, whom she jumps, dances, dandles, and feeds all day long. She is a very attractive person, is that child-loving girl. I have never seen any one in her station who possessed so thoroughly that undefinable charm, the lady-look. See her on a Sunday in her simplicity and her white frock, and she might pass for an earl's daughter. She likes flowers, too, and has a profusion of white stocks under her window, as pure and delicate as herself.

The first house on the opposite side of the way is the blacksmith's; a gloomy dwelling, where the sun never seems to shine; dark and smoky within and without, like a forge. The blacksmith is a high officer in our

little state, nothing less than a constable; but, alas! alas! when tumults arise, and the constable is called for, he will commonly be found in the thickest of the fray. Lucky would it be for his wife and her eight children if there were no public-house in the land: an inveterate inclination to enter those bewitching doors is Mr. Constable's only fault.

Next to this official dwelling is a spruce brick tenement, red, high, and narrow, boasting one above another three sash-windows, the only sash-windows in the village, with a clematis on one side and a rose on the other, tall and narrow like itself. That slender mansion has a fine genteel look. The little parlour seems made for Hogarth's old maid and her stunted footboy; for tea and card-parties,—it would just hold one table; for the rustle of faded silks, and the splendour of old China; for the delight of four by honours, and a little snug quiet scandal between the deals; for affected gentility and real starvation. This should have been its destiny; but fate has been unpropitious: it belongs to a plump, merry, bustling dame, with four fat, rosy, noisy children, the very essence of vulgarity and plenty.

Then comes the village shop, like other village shops, multifarious as a bazaar; a repository for bread, shoes, tea, cheese, tape, ribands, and bacon; for every thing, in short, except the one particular thing which you happen to want at the moment, and will be sure not to

find. The people are civil and thriving, and frugal withal; they have let the upper part of their house to two young women (one of them is a pretty blue-eyed girl) who teach little children their A B C, and make caps and gowns for their mammas,—parcel schoolmistress, parcel mantua-maker. I believe they find adorning the body a more profitable vocation than adorning the mind.

Divided from the shop by a narrow yard, and opposite the shoemaker's, is a habitation of whose inmates I shall say nothing. A cottage—no—a miniature house, with many additions, little odds and ends of places, pantries, and what not; all angles, and of a charming in-and-outness; a little bricked court before one half, and a little flower-yard before the other; the walls, old and weather-stained, covered with hollyhocks, roses, honeysuckles, and a great apricot-tree; the casements full of geraniums; (ah, there is our superb white cat peeping out from amongst them!) the closets (our landlord has the assurance to call them rooms) full of contrivances and corner-cupboards; and the little garden behind full of common flowers, tulips, pinks, larkspurs, pionies, stocks, and carnations, with an arbour of privet, not unlike a sentry-box, where one lives in a delicious green light, and looks out on the gayest of all gay flower-beds. That house was built on purpose to show in what an exceedingly small compass

comfort may be packed. Well, I will loiter there no longer.

The next tenement is a place of importance, the Rose inn; a white-washed building, retired from the road behind its fine swinging sign, with a little bow-window room coming out on one side, and forming, with our stable on the other, a sort of open square, which is the constant resort of carts, waggons, and return chaises. There are two carts there now, and mine host is serving them with beer in his eternal red waistcoat. He is a thriving man, and a portly, as his waistcoat attests, which has been twice let out within this twelvemonth. Our landlord has a stirring wife, a hopeful son, and a daughter, the belle of the village; not so pretty as the fair nymph of the shoe-shop, and far less elegant, but ten times as fine; all curlpapers in the morning, like a porcupine, all curls in the afternoon, like a poodle, with more flounces than curlpapers, and more lovers than curls. Miss Phœbe is fitter for town than country; and, to do her justice, she has a consciousness of that fitness, and turns her steps town-ward as often as she can. She is gone to B—to-day with her last and principal lover, a recruiting serjeant—a man as tall as Serjeant Kite, and as impudent. Some day or other he will carry off Miss Phœbe.

In a line with the bow-window room is a low garden-wall, belonging to a house under repair:—the white

house opposite the collar-maker's shop, with four lime-trees before it, and a waggon-load of bricks at the door. That house is the plaything of a wealthy, well-meaning, whimsical person, who lives about a mile off. He has a passion for brick and mortar, and, being too wise to meddle with his own residence, diverts himself with altering and re-altering, improving and re-improving, doing and undoing here. It is a perfect Penelope's web. Carpenters and bricklayers have been at work for these eighteen months, and yet I sometimes stand and wonder whether any thing has really been done. One exploit in last June was, however, by no means equivocal. Our good neighbour fancied that the limes shaded the rooms, and made them dark, (there was not a creature in the house but the workmen,) so he had all the leaves stripped from every tree. There they stood, poor miserable skeletons, as bare as Christmas under the glowing midsummer sun. Nature revenged herself in her own sweet and gracious manner; fresh leaves sprang out, and at nearly Christmas the foliage was as brilliant as when the outrage was committed.

Next door lives a carpenter, "famed ten miles round, and worthy all his fame;" few cabinet-makers surpass him, with his excellent wife, and their little daughter Lizzy, the plaything and queen of the village, a child three years old according to the register, but six in size and strength and intellect, in power and in self-

will. She manages every body in the place, her school-mistress included; turns the wheeler's children out of their own little cart, and makes them draw her; seduces cakes and lollypops from the very shop window; makes the lazy carry her, the silent talk to her, the grave romp with her; does any thing she pleases; is absolutely irresistible. Her chief attraction lies in her exceeding power of loving, and her firm reliance on the love and indulgence of others. How impossible it would be to disappoint the dear little girl when she runs to meet you, slides her pretty hand into yours, looks up gladly in your face, and says, "Come!" You must go: you cannot help it. Another part of the charm is her singular beauty. Together with a good deal of the character of Napoleon, she has something of his square, sturdy, upright form, with the finest limbs in the world, a complexion purely English, a round laughing face, sunburnt and rosy, large merry blue eyes, curling brown hair, and a wonderful play of countenance. She has the imperial attitudes too, and loves to stand with her hands behind her, or folded over her bosom; and sometimes, when she has a little touch of shyness, she clasps them together on the top of her head, pressing down her shining curls, and looking so exquisitely pretty! Yes, Lizzy is queen of the village! She has but one rival in her dominions, a certain white greyhound called May-flower, much her friend, who re-

sembles her in beauty and strength, in playfulness, and almost in sagacity, and reigns over the animal world as she over the human. They are both coming with me, Lizzy and Lizzy's "pretty May." We are now at the end of the street; a cross lane, a rope-walk, shaded with limes and oaks, and a cool clear pond overhung with elms, lead us to the bottom of the hill. There is still one house round the corner, ending in a picturesque wheeler's shop. The dwelling-house is more ambitious. Look at the fine flowered window-blinds, the green door with the brass knocker, and the somewhat prim but very civil person, who is sending off a labouring man with sirs and curtsies enough for a prince of the blood. Those are the curate's lodgings—apartments his landlady would call them: he lives with his own family four miles off, but once or twice a week he comes to his neat little parlour to write sermons, to marry, or to bury, as the case may require. Never were better or kinder people than his host and hostess; and there is a fine reflection of clerical importance about them, since their connexion with the Church, which is quite edifying—a decorum, a gravity, a solemn politeness. Oh, to see the worthy wheeler carry the gown after his lodger on a Sunday, nicely pinned up in his wife's best handkerchief!—or to hear him rebuke a squalling child or a squabbling woman! The curate is nothing to him. He is fit to be perpetual churchwarden.

We must now cross the lane into the shady rope-walk. That pretty white cottage opposite, which stands straggling at the end of the village in a garden full of flowers, belongs to our mason, the shortest of men, and his handsome, tall wife: he a dwarf, with the voice of a giant; one starts when he begins to talk as if he were shouting through a speaking trumpet; she, the sister, daughter, and grand-daughter, of a long line of gardeners, and no contemptible one herself. It is very magnanimous in me not to hate her; for she beats me in my own way, in chrysanthemums, and dahlias, and the like gauds. Her plants are sure to live; mine have a sad trick of dying, perhaps because I love them, "not wisely, but too well," and kill them with over-kindness. Half-way up the hill is another detached cottage, the residence of an officer and his beautiful family. That eldest boy, who is hanging over the gate, and looking with such intense childish admiration at my Lizzy, might be a model for a Cupid.

How pleasantly the road winds up the hill, with its broad green borders and hedge-rows so thickly timbered! How finely the evening sun falls on that sandy excavated bank, and touches the farm-house on the top of the eminence! and how clearly defined and relieved is the figure of the man who is just coming down! It is poor John Evans, the gardener—an excellent gardener till about ten years ago, when he lost his wife, and became

insane. He was sent to St. Luke's, and dismissed as cured; but his power was gone and his strength; he could no longer manage a garden, nor submit to the restraint, nor encounter the fatigue of regular employment; so he retreated to the workhouse, the pensioner and factotum of the village, amongst whom he divides his services. His mind often wanders, intent on some fantastic and impracticable plan, and lost to present objects; but he is perfectly harmless, and full of a child-like simplicity, a smiling contentedness, a most touching gratitude. Every one is kind to John Evans, for there is that about him which must be loved; and his unprotectedness, his utter defencelessness, have an irresistible claim on every better feeling. I know nobody who inspires so deep and tender a pity; he improves all around him. He is useful, too, to the extent of his little power; will do any thing, but loves gardening best, and still piques himself on his old arts of pruning fruit-trees, and raising cucumbers. He is the happiest of men just now, for he has the management of a melon bed—a melon bed!—fie! What a grand pompous name was that for three melon plants under a hand-light! John Evans is sure that they will succeed. We shall see: as the chancellor said, "I doubt."

We are now on the very brow of the eminence, close to the Hill-house and its beautiful garden. On the outer edge of the paling, hanging over the bank that

skirts the road, is an old thorn—such a thorn! The long sprays covered with snowy blossoms, so graceful, so elegant, so lightsome, and yet so rich! There only wants a pool under the thorn to give a still lovelier reflection, quivering and trembling, like a tuft of feathers, whiter and greener than the life, and more prettily mixed with the bright blue sky. There should indeed be a pool; but on the dark grass-plot, under the high bank, which is crowned by that magnificent plume, there is something that does almost as well,—Lizzy and May-flower in the midst of a game at romps, “making a sun-shine in the shady place;” Lizzy rolling, laughing, clapping her hands, and glowing like a rose; May-flower playing about her like summer lightning, dazzling the eyes with her sudden turns, her leaps, her bounds, her attacks and her escapes. She darts round the lovely little girl, with the same momentary touch that the swallow skims over the water, and has exactly the same power of flight, the same matchless ease and strength and grace. What a pretty picture they would make; what a pretty foreground they do make to the real landscape! The road winding down the hill with a slight bend, like that in the High-street at Oxford; a waggon slowly ascending, and a horseman cantering up at full speed—(ah! Lizzy, May-flower will certainly desert you to have a gambol with that blood-horse!) half-way down, just at the turn, the red cottage of the

lieutenant, covered with vines, the very image of comfort and content ; farther down, on the opposite side, the small white dwelling of the little mason ; then the limes and the rope-walk ; then the village street, peeping through the trees, whose clustering tops hide all but the chimneys and various roofs of the houses, and here and there some angle of a wall : farther on, the elegant town of B——, with its fine old church-towers and spires ; the whole view shut in by a range of chalky hills ; and over every part of the picture trees, so profusely scattered, that it appears like a woodland scene, with glades and villages intermixed. The trees are of all kinds and all hues, chiefly the finely-shaped elm, of so deep and bright a green, the tips of whose high outer branches drop down with such a crisp and garland-like richness, and the oak, whose stately form is just now so splendidly adorned by the sunny colouring of the young leaves. Turning again up the hill, we find ourselves on that peculiar charm of English scenery, a green common, divided by the road ; the right side fringed by hedge-rows and trees, with cottages and farm-houses irregularly placed, and terminated by a double avenue of noble oaks ; the left, prettier still, dappled by bright pools of water, and islands of cottages and cottage-gardens, and sinking gradually down to corn-fields and meadows, and an old farm-house, with pointed roofs and clustered chimneys, looking out

from its blooming orchard, and backed by woody hills. The common is itself the prettiest part of the prospect; half covered with low furze, whose golden blossoms reflect so intensely the last beams of the setting sun, and alive with cows and sheep, and two sets of cricketers: one of young men, surrounded with spectators, some standing, some sitting, some stretched on the grass, all taking a delighted interest in the game; the other, a merry groupe of little boys, at humble distance, for whom even cricket is scarcely lively enough, shouting, leaping, and enjoying themselves to their hearts' content. But cricketers and country boys are too important persons in our village to be talked of merely as figures in the landscape. They deserve an individual introduction—an essay to themselves—and they shall have it. No fear of forgetting the good-humoured faces that meet us in our walks every day.

H A N N A H.

THE prettiest cottage on our village-green is the little dwelling of Dame Wilson. It stands in a corner of the common, where the hedgerows go curving off into a sort of bay round a clear bright pond, the earliest haunt of the swallows. A deep, woody green lane, such as Hobbima or Ruysdael might have painted, a lane that hints of nightingales, forms one boundary of the garden, and a sloping meadow the other; whilst the cottage itself, a low thatched irregular building, backed by a blooming orchard, and covered with honeysuckle and jessamine, looks like the chosen abode of snugness and comfort. And so it is.

Dame Wilson was a respected servant in a most respectable family, where she passed all the early part of her life, and which she quitted only on her marriage with a man of character and industry, and of that peculiar universality of genius which forms, what is called in country phrase, a handy fellow. He could do any sort of work; was thatcher, carpenter, bricklayer,

painter, gardener, game-keeper, "every thing by turns, and nothing long." No job came amiss to him. He killed pigs, mended shoes, cleaned clocks, doctored cows, dogs, and horses, and even went as far as bleeding and drawing teeth in his experiments on the human subject. In addition to these multifarious talents, he was ready, obliging, and unfearing; jovial withal, and fond of good-fellowship; and endowed with a promptness of resource which made him the general adviser of the stupid, the puzzled, and the timid. He was universally admitted to be the cleverest man in the parish; and his death, which happened about ten years ago, in consequence of standing in the water, drawing a pond for one neighbour, at a time when he was over-heated by loading hay for another, made quite a gap in our village commonwealth. John Wilson had no rival, and has had no successor;—for the Robert Ellis, whom certain youngsters would fain exalt to a co-partnery of fame, is simply nobody—a bell-ringer, a ballad-singer—a troller of profane catches—a fiddler—a bruiser—a loller on alehouse benches—a teller of good stories—a mimic—a poet!—What is all this to compare with the solid parts of John Wilson? Whose clock hath Robert Ellis cleaned?—whose windows hath he mended?—whose dog hath he broken?—whose pigs hath he rung?—whose pond hath he fished?—whose hay hath he saved?—whose cow hath he cured?—whose calf hath

he killed?—whose teeth hath he drawn?—whom hath he bled? Tell me that, irreverent whipsters! No! John Wilson is not to be replaced. He was missed by the whole parish; and most of all he was missed at home. His excellent wife was left the sole guardian and protector of two fatherless girls; one an infant at her knee, the other a pretty handy lass about nine years old. Cast thus upon the world, there must have been much to endure, much to suffer; but it was borne with a smiling patience, a hopeful cheeriness of spirit, and a decent pride, which seemed to command success as well as respect in their struggle for independence. Without assistance of any sort, by needle-work, by washing and mending lace and fine linen, and other skilful and profitable labours, and by the produce of her orchard and poultry, Dame Wilson contrived to maintain herself and her children in their old comfortable home. There was no visible change; she and the little girls were as neat as ever; the house had still within and without the same sunshiny cleanliness, and the garden was still famous over all other gardens for its cloves, and stocks, and double wall-flowers. But the sweetest flower of the garden, the joy and pride of her mother's heart, was her daughter Hannah. Well might she be proud of her! At sixteen Hannah Wilson was, beyond a doubt, the prettiest girl in the village, and the best. Her beauty was quite in a different style from the common

country rosebud—far more choice and rare. Its chief characteristic was modesty. A light youthful figure, exquisitely graceful and rapid in all its movements; springy, elastic, and buoyant as a bird, and almost as shy; a fair innocent face, with downcast blue eyes, and smiles and blushes coming and going almost with her thoughts; a low soft voice, sweet even in its monosyllables; a dress remarkable for neatness and propriety, and borrowing from her delicate beauty an air of superiority not its own;—such was the outward woman of Hannah. Her mind was very like her person; modest, graceful, gentle, affectionate, grateful, and generous above all. The generosity of the poor is always a very real and fine thing: they give what they want; and Hannah was of all poor people the most generous. She loved to give; it was her pleasure, her luxury. Rosy-cheeked apples, plums with the bloom on them, nose-gays of cloves and blossomed myrtle; these were offerings which Hannah delighted to bring to those whom she loved, or those who had shown her kindness; whilst to others, who needed other attentions than fruit and flowers, she would give her time, her assistance, her skill; for Hannah inherited her mother's dexterity in feminine employments, with something of her father's versatile power. Besides being an excellent laundress, she was accomplished in all the arts of the needle, millinery, dress-making, and plain work; a capital cutter-

out, an incomparable mender, and endowed with a gift of altering, which made old things better than new. She had no rival at a *rifacimento*, as half the turned gowns on the common can witness. As a dairy-woman, and a rearer of pigs and poultry, she was equally successful: none of her ducks and turkeys ever died of neglect or carelessness, or, to use the phrase of the poultry-yard on such occasions, of "ill luck." Hannah's fowls never dreamed of sliding out of the world in such an ignoble way; they all lived to be killed, to make a noise at their deaths, as chickens should do. She was also a famous "scholar;" kept accounts, wrote bills, read letters, and answered them; was a trusty accomptant, and a safe confidante. There was no end to Hannah's usefulness or Hannah's kindness; and her prudence was equal to either. Except to be kind or useful, she never left her home; attended no fairs, or revels, or Mayings; went no where but to church; and seldom made a nearer approach to rustic revelry than by standing at her own garden-gate on a Sunday evening, with her little sister in her hand, to look at the lads and lasses on the green. In short, our village beauty had fairly reached her twentieth year without a sweetheart, without the slightest suspicion of her having ever written a love-letter on her own account; when, all on a sudden, appearances changed. She was missing at the "accustomed gate;" and one had seen a

young man go into Dame Wilson's; and another had descried a trim elastic figure walking, not unaccompanied, down the shady lane. Matters were quite clear. Hannah had gotten a lover; and, when poor little Susan, who, deserted by her sister, ventured to peep rather nearer at the gay groupe, was laughingly questioned on the subject, the hesitating No, and the half Yes, of the smiling child, were equally conclusive.

Since the new marriage act*, we, who belong to country magistrates, have gained a priority over the rest of the parish in matrimonial news. We (the privileged) see on a work-day the names which the sabbath announces to the generality. Many a blushing awkward pair hath our little lame clerk (a sorry Cupid!) ushered in between dark and light to stammer and hacker, to bow and curtsy, to sign or make a mark, as it pleases Heaven. One Saturday, at the usual hour, the limping clerk made his appearance; and, walking through our little hall, I saw a fine athletic young man, the very image of health and vigour, mental and bodily, holding the hand of a young woman, who, with her head half buried in a geranium in the window, was turning bashfully away, listening, and yet not seeming to listen, to his tender whispers. The shrinking grace of that

* It is necessary to observe that this story was written during the short operation of that curious experiment in legislation.

bending figure was not to be mistaken. "Hannah!" and she went aside with me, and a rapid series of questions and answers conveyed the story of the courtship. "William was," said Hannah, "a journeyman hatter in B. He had walked over one Sunday evening to see the cricketing, and then he came again. Her mother liked him. Every body liked her William—and she had promised—she was going—was it wrong?"—"Oh no!—and where are you to live?"—"William has got a room in B. He works for Mr. Smith, the rich hatter in the market-place, and Mr. Smith speaks of him—oh, so well! But William will not tell me where our room is. I suppose in some narrow street or lane, which he is afraid I shall not like, as our common is so pleasant. He little thinks—any where"—She stopped suddenly; but her blush and her clasped hands finished the sentence, "any where with him!"—"And when is the happy day?"—"On Monday fortnight, Madam," said the bridegroom elect, advancing with the little clerk to summon Hannah to the parlour, "the earliest day possible." He drew her arm through his, and we parted.

The Monday fortnight was a glorious morning; one of those rare November days when the sky and the air are soft and bright as in April. "What a beautiful day for Hannah!" was the first exclamation of the breakfast-table. "Did she tell you where they should dine?"

—“ No, Ma'am ; I forgot to ask.”—“ I can tell you,” said the master of the house, with somewhat of good-humoured importance in his air, somewhat of the look of a man who, having kept a secret as long as it was necessary, is not sorry to get rid of the burthen. “ I can tell you : in London.”—“ In London !”—“ Yes. Your little favourite has been in high luck. She has married the only son of one of the best and richest men in B., Mr. Smith, the great hatter. It is quite a romance,” continued he : “ William Smith walked over one Sunday evening to see a match at cricket. He saw our pretty Hannah, and forgot to look at the cricketers. After having gazed his fill, he approached to address her, and the little damsel was off like a bird. William did not like her the less for that, and thought of her the more. He came again, and again ; and at last contrived to tame this wild dove, and even to get the *entrée* of the cottage. Hearing Hannah talk, is not the way to fall out of love with her. So William, at last finding his case serious, laid the matter before his father, and requested his consent to the marriage. Mr. Smith was at first a little startled ; but William is an only son, and an excellent son ; and, after talking with me, and looking at Hannah, (I believe her sweet face was the more eloquent advocate of the two,) he relented ; and having a spice of his son's romance, finding that he had not mentioned his situation in life, he made a point of its

being kept secret till the wedding-day. We have managed the business of settlements; and William, having discovered that his fair bride has some curiosity to see London, (a curiosity, by the bye, which I suspect she owes to you or poor Lucy,) intends taking her thither for a fortnight. He will then bring her home to one of the best houses in B., a fine garden, fine furniture, fine clothes, fine servants, and more money than she will know what to do with. Really the surprise of Lord E.'s farmer's daughter, when, thinking she had married his steward, he brought her to Burleigh, and installed her as its mistress, could hardly have been greater. I hope the shock will not kill Hannah though, as is said to have been the case with that poor lady."—"Oh no! Hannah loves her husband too well. Any where with him!"

And I was right. Hannah has survived the shock. She is returned to B., and I have been to call on her. I never saw any thing so delicate and bride-like as she looked in her white gown and her lace mob, in a room light and simple, and tasteful and elegant, with nothing fine except some beautiful green-house plants. Her reception was a charming mixture of sweetness and modesty, a little more respectful than usual, and far more shamefaced! Poor thing! her cheeks must have pained her! But this was the only difference. In every thing else she is still the same Hannah, and has lost none of

her old habits of kindness and gratitude. She was making a handsome matronly cap, evidently for her mother, and spoke, even with tears, of her new father's goodness to her and to Susan. She would fetch the cake and wine herself, and would gather, in spite of all remonstrance, some of her choice flowers as a parting nosegay. She did, indeed, just hint at her troubles with visitors and servants,—how strange and sad it was! seemed distressed at ringing the bell, and visibly shrank from the sound of a double knock. But, in spite of these calamities, Hannah is a happy woman. The double rap was her husband's; and the glow on her cheek, and the smile of her lips and eyes when he appeared, spoke more plainly than ever, "Any where with him!"

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

FROST.

JANUARY 23d.—At noon to-day I and my white greyhound, May-flower, set out for a walk into a very beautiful world,—a sort of silent fairy-land,—a creation of that matchless magician the hoar-frost. There had been just snow enough to cover the earth and all its colours with one sheet of pure and uniform white, and just time enough since the snow had fallen to allow the hedges to be freed of their fleecy load, and clothed with a delicate coating of rime. The atmosphere was deliciously calm; soft, almost mild, in spite of the thermometer; no perceptible air, but a stillness that might almost be felt; the sky, rather grey than blue, throwing out in bold relief the snow-covered roofs of our village, and the rimy trees that rise above them; and the sun shining dimly as through a veil, giving a pale fair light, like the moon, only brighter. There was a silence, too, that might become the moon, as we stood

at our little gate looking up the quiet street ; a sabbath-like pause of work and play, rare on a work-day : nothing was audible but the pleasant hum of frost, that low monotonous sound, which is perhaps the nearest approach that life and nature can make to silence. The very waggons as they come down the hill along the beaten track of crisp yellowish frost-dust, glide along like shadows ; even May's bounding footsteps, at her height of glee and of speed, fall like snow upon snow.

But we shall have noise enough presently : May has stopped at Lizzy's door ; and Lizzy, as she sate on the window-sill, with her bright rosy face laughing through the casement, has seen her and disappeared. She is coming. No ! The key is turning in the door, and sounds of evil omen issue through the key-hole—sturdy 'let-me-outs,' and 'I will-gos,' mixed with shrill cries on May and on me from Lizzy, piercing through a low continuous harangue, of which the prominent parts are apologies, chilblains, sliding, broken bones, lollypops, rods, and gingerbread, from Lizzy's careful mother. 'Don't scratch the door, May ! Don't roar so, my Lizzy ! We'll call for you as we come back.'—'I'll go now ! Let me out ; I will go !' are the last words of Miss Lizzy. Mem. Not to spoil that child—if I can help it. But I do think her mother might have let the poor little soul walk with us to-day. No-

thing worse for children than coddling. Nothing better for chilblains than exercise. Besides, I don't believe she has any—and as to breaking her bones in sliding, I don't suppose there's a slide on the common. These murmuring cogitations have brought us up the hill, and half-way across the light and airy common, with its bright expanse of snow and its clusters of cottages, whose turf fires send such wreaths of smoke sailing up the air, and diffusing such aromatic fragrance around. And now comes the delightful sound of childish voices, ringing with glee and merriment almost from beneath our feet. Ah, Lizzy, your mother was right! They are shouting from that deep irregular pool, all glass now, where, on two long, smooth, liny slides, half a dozen ragged urchins are slipping along in tottering triumph. Half a dozen steps bring us to the bank right above them. May can hardly resist the temptation of joining her friends, for most of the varlets are of her acquaintance, especially the rogue who leads the slide,—he with the brimless hat, whose bronzed complexion and white flaxen hair, reversing the usual lights and shadows of the human countenance, give so strange and foreign a look to his flat and comic features. This hobgoblin, Jack Rapley by name, is May's great crony; and she stands on the brink of the steep irregular descent, her black eyes fixed full upon him, as if she intended him the favour of jumping on his head. She

does : she is down, and upon him : but Jack Rapley is not easily to be knocked off his feet. He saw her coming, and in the moment of her leap sprang dexterously off the slide on the rough ice, steadying himself by the shoulder of the next in the file, which unlucky follower, thus unexpectedly checked in his career, fell plump backwards, knocking down the rest of the line like a nest of card-houses. There is no harm done ; but there they lie roaring, kicking, sprawling, in every attitude of comic distress, whilst Jack Rapley and Mayflower, sole authors of this calamity, stand apart from the throng, fondling, and coquetting, and complimenting each other, and very visibly laughing, May in her black eyes, Jack in his wide close-shut mouth, and his whole monkey-face, at their comrades' mischances. I think, Miss May, you may as well come up again, and leave Master Rapley to fight your battles. He'll get out of the scrape. He is a rustic wit—a sort of Robin Goodfellow—the sauciest, idlest, cleverest, best-natured boy in the parish ; always foremost in mischief, and always ready to do a good turn. The sages of our village predict sad things of Jack Rapley, so that I am sometimes a little ashamed to confess, before wise people, that I have a lurking predilection for him, (in common with other naughty ones), and that I like to hear him talk to May almost as well as she does. 'Come, May!' and up she springs, as light as a bird.

The road is gay now; carts and post-chaises, and girls in red cloaks, and, afar off, looking almost like a toy, the coach. It meets us fast and soon. How much happier the walkers look than the riders—especially the frost-bitten gentleman, and the shivering lady with the invisible face, sole passengers of that commodious machine! Hooded, veiled, and bonneted as she is, one sees from her attitude how miserable she would look uncovered.

Another pond, and another noise of children. More sliding? Oh! no. This is a sport of higher pretension. Our good neighbour, the lieutenant, skating, and his own pretty little boys, and two or three other four-year-old elves, standing on the brink in an ecstasy of joy and wonder! Oh what happy spectators! And what a happy performer! They admiring, he admired, with an ardour and sincerity never excited by all the quadrilles and the spread eagles of the Seine and the Serpentine. He really skaites well though, and I am glad I came this way; for, with all the father's feelings sitting gaily at his heart, it must still gratify the pride of skill to have one spectator at that solitary pond who has seen skating before.

Now we have reached the trees,—the beautiful trees! never so beautiful as to-day. Imagine the effect of a straight and regular double avenue of oaks, nearly a mile long, arching over head, and closing into perspec-

tive like the roof and columns of a cathedral, every tree and branch encrusted with the bright and delicate congelation of hoar-frost, white and pure as snow, delicate and defined as carved ivory. How beautiful it is, how uniform, how various, how filling, how satiating to the eye and to the mind—above all, how melancholy! There is a thrilling awfulness, an intense feeling of simple power in that naked and colourless beauty, which falls on the heart like the thought of death—death pure, and glorious, and smiling,—but still death. Sculpture has always the same effect on my imagination, and painting never. Colour is life.—We are now at the end of this magnificent avenue, and at the top of a steep eminence commanding a wide view over four counties—a landscape of snow. A deep lane leads abruptly down the hill; a mere narrow cart-track, sinking between high banks clothed with fern and furze and low broom, crowned with luxuriant hedgerows, and famous for their summer smell of thyme. How lovely these banks are now—the tall weeds and the gorse fixed and stiffened in the hoar frost, which fringes round the bright prickly holly, the pendent foliage of the bramble, and the deep orange leaves of the pollard oaks! Oh, this is rime in its loveliest form! And there is still a berry here and there on the holly, “blushing in its natural coral” through the delicate tracery, still a stray hip or haw for the small birds, who abound here always. The

poor birds, how tame they are, how sadly tame! There is the beautiful and rare crested wren, "that shadow of a bird," as White of Selborn calls it, perched in the middle of the hedge, nestling as it were amongst the cold bare boughs, seeking, poor pretty thing, for the warmth it will not find. And there, farther on, just under the bank, by the slender runlet, which still trickles between its transparent fantastic margin of thin ice, as if it were a thing of life,—there, with a swift scudding motion, flits, in short low flights, the gorgeous kingfisher, its magnificent plumage of scarlet and blue flashing in the sun, like the glories of some tropical bird. He is come for water to this little spring by the hill side,—water which even his long bill and slender head can hardly reach, so nearly do the fantastic forms of those garland-like icy margins meet over the tiny stream beneath. It is rarely that one sees the shy beauty so close or so long; and it is pleasant to see him in the grace and beauty of his natural liberty, the only way to look at a bird. We used, before we lived in a street, to fix a little board outside the parlour-window, and cover it with bread-crumbs in the hard weather. It was quite delightful to see the pretty things come and feed, to conquer their shyness, and do away their mistrust. First came the more social tribes, "the robin red-breast and the wren," cautiously, suspiciously, picking up a crumb on the wing, with the little keen bright

eye fixed on the window ; then they would stop for two pecks ; then stay till they were satisfied. The shy birds, tamed by their example, came next ; and at last one saucy fellow of a blackbird—a sad glutton, he would clear the board in two minutes,—used to tap his yellow bill against the window for more. How we loved the fearless confidence of that fine, frank-hearted creature ! And surely he loved us. I wonder the practice is not more general.—“ May ! May ! naughty May ! ” She has frightened away the kingfisher ; and now, in her coaxing penitence, she is covering me with snow. “ Come, pretty May ! it is time to go home. ”

THAW.

January 28th.—We have had rain, and snow, and frost, and rain again ; four days of absolute confinement. Now it is a thaw and a flood ; but our light gravelly soil, and country boots, and country hardihood, will carry us through. What a dripping comfortless day it is ! just like the last days of November : no sun, no sky, grey or blue ; one low overhanging, dark, dismal cloud, like London smoke : May-flower is out coursing too, and Lizzy gone to school. Never mind. Up the hill again ! Walk we must. Oh what a watery world to look back upon ! Thames, Kennet,

Loddon—all overflowed; our famous town, inland once, turned into a sort of Venice; C. park converted into an island; and the long range of meadows from B. to W. one huge unnatural lake, with trees growing out of it. Oh what a watery world!—I will look at it no longer. I will walk on. The road is alive again. Noise is re-born. Waggons creak, horses splash, carts rattle, and pattens paddle through the dirt with more than their usual clink. The common has its old fine tints of green and brown, and its old variety of inhabitants, horses, cows, sheep, pigs, and donkeys. The ponds are unfrozen, except where some melancholy piece of melting ice floats sullenly upon the water; and cackling geese and gabbling ducks have replaced the lieutenant and Jack Rapley. The avenue is chill and dark, the hedges are dripping, the lanes knee-deep, and all nature is in a state of “dissolution and thaw.”

MODERN ANTIQUES.

EARLY in the present century there lived in the ancient town of B. two complete and remarkable specimens of the ladies of eighty years ago—ladies cased inwardly and outwardly in Addison and whalebone. How they had been preserved in this entireness, amidst the collision and ridicule of a country town, seemed as puzzling a question as the preservation of bees in amber, or mummies in pyramids, or any other riddle that serves to amuse the naturalist or the antiquarian. But so it was. They were old maids and sisters, and so alike in their difference from all other women, that they may be best described together; any little non-resemblance may be noted afterwards; it was no more than nature, prodigal of variety, would make in two leaves from the same oak-tree.

Both, then, were as short as women well could be without being entitled to the name of dwarf, or carried about to fairs for a show;—both were made considerably shorter by the highest of all high heels, and the

tallest of all tall caps, each of which artificial elevations was as ostentatiously conspicuous as the legs and cover of a pipkin, and served equally to add to the squatness of the real machine ; both were lean, wrinkled, withered, and old ; both enveloped their aged persons in the richest silks, displayed over large hoops, and stays the tightest and stiffest that ever pinched in a beauty of George the Second's reign. The gown was of that make formerly, I believe, called a sacque, and of a pattern so enormous, that one flower, with its stalk and leaves, would nearly cover the three quarters of a yard in length, of which the tail might, at a moderate computation, consist. Over this they wore a gorgeously figured apron, whose flourishing white embroidery vied in size with the plants on the robe ; a snowy muslin neckerchief, rigidly pinned down ; and over that a black lace tippet of the same shape, parting at the middle, to display a gay breast-knot. The riband of which this last decoration was composed was generally the same which adorned the towering lappeted cap, a sort of poppy colour, which they called Pompadour. The sleeves were cut off below the elbows with triple ruffles of portentous length. Brown leather mittens, with peaks turned back, and lined with blue satin, and a variety of tall rings in an odd, out-of-fashion variety of enamelling, and figures of hair,

completed the decoration of their hands and arms. The carriage of these useful members was at least equally singular; they had adapted themselves in a remarkable manner to the little taper wasp-like point in which the waist ended, to which the elbows, ruffles and all, adhered as closely as if they had been glued, whilst the ringed and mittened hands, when not employed in knitting, were crossed saltier-wise, in front of the apron. The other termination of their figure was adorned with black stuff shoes, very peaked, with points upwards, and massive silver buckles. Their walking costume was, in winter, a black silk cloak, lined with rabbit-skins, with holes for the arms; in summer, another tippet and a calash,—no bonnet could hold the turreted cap. Their motion out of doors was indescribable; it most nearly resembled sailing. They seemed influenced by the wind in a way incidental to no moving thing, except a ship or a shuttlecock; and, indeed, one boisterous blowing night, about the equinox, when standing on some high stone steps, waiting for a carriage to take her home from a party, the wind did catch one of them, and, but for the intervention of a tall footman, who seized her as one would seize a fly-away umbrella, and held her down by main force, the poor little lady would have been carried up like an air-balloon. Her feelings must have been pretty much si-

milar to those of Gulliver in Brobdignag, when flown away with by the eagle. Half a minute later, and she was gone.

So far they were exact counterparts. The chief variation lay in the face. Amidst the general hue of age and wrinkles, you could just distinguish that Mrs. Theodosia had been brown, and Mrs. Frances fair. There was a yellow shine here and there amongst the white hairs, curiously rolled over a cushion high above the forehead, that told of Fanny's golden locks; whilst the purely grey rouleau of Mrs. Theodosia showed its mixture of black and white still plainer. Mrs. Frances, too, had the blue eye, with a laughing light, which so often retains its flash to extreme age; whilst Mrs. Theodosia's orbs, bright no longer, had once been hazel. Mrs. Theodosia's aquiline nose, and long sociable chin, evinced that disposition to meet which is commonly known by the name of a pair of nut-crackers; Mrs. Frances' features, on the other hand, were rather terse and sharp. Still there was, in spite of these material differences, that look of kindred, that inexplicable and indefinable family likeness, which is so frequently found in sisters; greatly increased in the present case by a similarity in the voice that was quite startling. Both tongues were quick and clear, and high and rattling, to a degree that seemed rather to belong to machinery than to human articulation; and

when welcomes and how-d'ye-dos were pouring both at once on either side, a stranger was apt to gaze in ludicrous perplexity, as if beset by a ventriloquist, or haunted by strange echoes. When the immediate cackle subsided, they were easily distinguished. Mrs. Theodosia was good, and kind, and hospitable, and social; Mrs. Frances was all that, and was besides shrewd, and clever, and literary, to a degree not very common in her day, though not approaching to the pitch of a blue-stocking lady of the present. Accident was partly the cause of this unusual love of letters. They had known Richardson; had been admitted amongst his flower-garden of young ladies; and still talked familiarly of Miss Highmore, Miss Fielding, Miss Collier, and Miss Mulso,—they had never learned to call her Mrs. Chapone. Latterly the taste had been renewed and quickened, by their having the honour of a distant relationship to one of the most amiable and unfortunate of modern poets. So Mrs. Frances studied novels and poetry, in addition to her sister's sermons and cookery-books; though (as she used to boast) without doing a stitch the less of knitting, or playing a pool the fewer in the course of the year. Their usual occupations were those of other useful old ladies; superintending the endowed girls' school of the town with a vigilance and a jealousy of abuses that might have done honour to Mr. Hume; taking an active part in the

more private charities, donations of flannel petticoats, or the loan of baby-things; visiting in a quiet way; and going to church whenever the church door was open.

Their abode was a dwelling ancient and respectable, like themselves, that looked as if it had never undergone the slightest variation, inside or out, since they had been born in it. The rooms were many, low and small; full of little windows with little panes, and chimneys stuck perversely in the corners. The furniture was exactly to correspond; little patches of carpets in the middle of the slippery, dry-rubbed floors; tables and chairs of mahogany, black with age, but exceedingly neat and bright; and Japan cabinets and old China, which Mr. Beckford might have envied—treasures which had either never gone out of fashion, or had come in again. The garden was beautiful and beautifully placed; a series of terraces descending to rich and finely timbered meadows, through which the slow magnificent Thames rolled under the fine chalky hills of the pretty village of C. It was bounded on one side by the remains of an old friary, the end wall of a chapel with a Gothic window of open tracery in high preservation, as rich as point lace. It was full too of old-fashioned durable flowers, jessamine, honeysuckle, and the high-scented fraxinella; I never saw that delicious plant in such profusion. The garden-walks were

almost as smooth as the floors, thanks to the two assiduous serving maidens (nothing like a man servant ever entered this maidenly abode) who attended it. One, the under damsel, was a stout strapping country wench, changed from time to time as it happened; the other was as much a fixture as her mistresses. She had lived with them for forty years, and, except being twice as big and twice as tall, might have passed for another sister. She wore their gowns, (the two just made her one,) caps, ruffles, and aprons; talked with their voices and their phrases; followed them to church, and school, and market; scolded the school-mistress; heard the children their catechism; cut out flannel petticoats, and knit stockings to give away. Never was so complete an instance of assimilation! She had even become like them in face.

Having a brother who resided at a beautiful seat in the neighbourhood, and being to all intents and purposes of the patrician order, their visitors were very select, and rather more from the country than the town. Six formed the general number,—one table—a rubber or a pool—seldom more. As the only child of a very favourite friend, I used, during the holidays, to be admitted as a supernumerary; at first out of compliment to mama; latterly I stood on my own merits. I was found to be a quiet little girl; an excellent hander of muffins and cake; a connoisseur in green tea; an ama-

teur of quadrille—the most entertaining of all games to a looker-on; and, lastly and chiefly, a great lover and admirer of certain books, which filled two little shelves at cross corners with the chimney—namely, that volume of Cowper's Poems which contained John Gilpin, and the whole seven volumes of Sir Charles Grandison. With what delight I used to take down those dear books! It was an old edition;—perhaps that very first edition which, as Mrs. Barbauld says, the fine ladies used to hold up to one another at Ranelagh,—and adorned with prints, not certainly of the highest merit as works of art, but which served exceedingly to realise the story, and to make us, as it were, personally acquainted with the characters. The costume was pretty much that of my worthy hostesses, especially that of the two Miss Selbys; there was even in Miss Nancy's face a certain likeness to Mrs. Frances. I remember I used to wonder whether she carried her elbows in the same way. How I read and believed, and believed and read; and liked lady G. though I thought her naughty; and gave all my wishes to Harriet, though I thought her silly; and loved Emily with my whole heart! Clementina I did not quite understand; nor (I am half afraid to say so) do I now; and Sir Charles I positively disliked. He was the only thing in the book that I disbelieved. Those bowings seemed incredible. At last, however, I extended my faith even to him;

partly influenced by the irresistibility of the author, partly by the appearance of a real living beau, who in the matter of bowing might almost have competed with Sir Charles himself. This beau was no other than the town member, who, with his brother, was, when in the country, the constant attendant at these chosen parties.

Our member was a man of seventy, or thereabout, but wonderfully young-looking and well-preserved. It was said, indeed, that no fading belle was better versed in cosmetic secrets, or more devoted to the duties of the toilet. Fresh, upright, un-wrinkled, pearly-teethed, and point device in his accoutrements, he might have passed for fifty; and doubtless often did pass for such when apart from his old-looking younger brother; who, tall, lanky, shambling, long-visaged, and loosely dressed, gave a very vivid idea of Don Quixote, when stripped of his armour. Never was so consummate a courtier as our member! Of good family and small fortune, he had early in life been seized with the desire of representing the town in which he resided; and canvassing, sheer canvassing, without eloquence, without talent, without bribery, had brought him in and kept him in. There his ambition stopped. To be a member of parliament was with him not the means but the end of advancement. For forty years he represented an independent

borough, and, though regularly voting with every successive ministry, was, at the end of his career, as poor as when he began. He never sold himself, or stood suspected of selling himself—perhaps he might sometimes give himself away. But that he could not help. It was almost impossible for him to say No to any body,—quite so to a minister, or a constituent, or a constituent's wife or daughter. So he passed bowing and smiling through the world, the most disinterested of courtiers, the most subservient of upright men, with little other annoyance than a septennial alarm,—for sometimes an opposition was threatened, and sometimes it came; but then he went through a double course of smirks and hand-shakings, and all was well again. The great grievance of his life must have been the limitation in the number of franks. His apologies, when he happened to be full, were such as a man would make for a great fault; his lamentations, such as might become a great misfortune. Of course there was something ludicrous in this courtliness, but it was not contemptible; it only wanted to be obviously disinterested to become respectable. The expression might be exaggerated; but the feeling was real. He was always ready to show kindness to the utmost of his power to any human being. He would have been just as civil and supple if he had not

been M. P. It was his vocation. He could not help it.

This excellent person was an old bachelor ; and there was a rumour, some forty or fifty years old, that in the days of their bloom, there had been a little love affair, an attachment, some even said an engagement, how broken none could tell, between him and Mrs. Frances. Certain it is, that there were symptoms of flirtation still. His courtesy, always gallant to every female, had something more real and more tender towards " Fanny," as he was wont to call her ; and Fanny, on her side, was as conscious as heart could desire. She blushed and bridled ; fidgeted with her mittens or her apron ; flirted a fan nearly as tall as herself, and held her head on one side with that peculiar air which I have noted in the shyer birds, and ladies in love. She manœuvred to get him next her at the tea-table ; liked to be his partner at whist ; loved to talk of him in his absence ; knew to an hour the time of his return ; and did not dislike a little gentle raillery on the subject—even I—But, traitress to my sex, how can I jest with such feelings ? Rather let me sigh over the world of woe, that in fifty years of hopeless constancy must have passed through that maiden heart ! The timid hope ; the sickening suspense ; the slow, slow fear ; the bitter disappointment ;

the powerless anger ; the relenting ; the forgiveness ; and then again, that interest, kinder, truer, more unchanging than friendship, that lingering woman's love—Oh how can I jest over such feelings ? They are passed away—for she is gone, and he—but they clung by her to the last, and ceased only in death.

A GREAT FARM-HOUSE.

THESE are bad times for farmers. I am sorry for it. Independently of all questions of policy, as a mere matter of taste and of old association, it was a fine thing to witness the hearty hospitality, and to think of the social happiness of a great farm-house. No situation in life seemed so richly privileged; none had so much power for good and so little for evil; it seemed a place where pride could not live, and poverty could not enter. These thoughts pressed on my mind the other day, in passing the green sheltered lane, overhung with trees like an avenue, that leads to the great farm at M., where, ten or twelve years ago, I used to spend so many pleasant days. I could not help advancing a few paces up the lane, and then turning to lean over the gate, seemingly gazing on the rich undulating valley, crowned with woody hills, which, as I stood under that dark and shady arch, lay bathed in the sunshine before me, but really absorbed in thoughts of other times, in recollections of the old delights of that

delightful place, and of the admirable qualities of its owners. How often I had opened that gate, and how gaily—certain of meeting a smiling welcome—and what a picture of comfort it was!

Passing up the lane, we used first to encounter a thick solid suburb of ricks, of all sorts, shapes, and dimensions. Then came the farm, like a town; a magnificent series of buildings, stables, cart-houses, cow-houses, granaries, and barns, that might hold half the corn of the parish, placed at all angles towards each other, and mixed with smaller habitations for pigs, dogs, and poultry. They formed, together with the old substantial farm-house, a sort of amphitheatre, looking over a beautiful meadow, which swept greenly and abruptly down into fertile inclosures, richly set with hedge-row timber, oak, and ash, and elm. Both the meadow and the farm-yard swarmed with inhabitants of the earth and of the air; horses, oxen, cows, calves, heifers, sheep, and pigs; beautiful greyhounds, all manner of poultry, a tame goat, and a pet donkey.

The master of this land of plenty was well fitted to preside over it; a thick, stout man, of middle height, and middle age, with a healthy, ruddy, square face, all alive with intelligence and good-humour. There was a lurking jest in his eye, and a smile about the corners of his firmly-closed lips, that gave assurance of good fellowship. His voice was loud enough to

have hailed a ship at sea, without the assistance of a speaking-trumpet, wonderfully rich and round in its tones, and harmonizing admirably with his bluff, jovial visage. He wore his dark shining hair combed straight over his forehead, and had a trick, when particularly merry, of stroking it down with his hand. The moment his right hand approached his head, out-flew a jest.

Besides his own great farm, the business of which seemed to go on like machinery, always regular, prosperous, and unfailing,—besides this and two or three constant stewardships, and a perpetual succession of arbitrations, in which, such was the influence of his acuteness, his temper, and his sturdy justice, that he was often named by both parties, and left to decide alone,—in addition to these occupations, he was a sort of standing overseer and church-warden; he ruled his own hamlet like a despotic monarch, and took a prime minister's share in the government of the large parish to which it was attached; and one of the gentlemen, whose estates he managed, being the independent member for an independent borough, he had every now and then a contested election on his shoulders. Even that did not discompose him. He had always leisure to receive his friends at home, or to visit them abroad; to take journeys to London, or make excursions to the sea-side; was as punctual in pleasure as in

business, and thought being happy and making happy as much the purpose of his life as getting rich. His great amusement was coursing. He kept several brace of capital greyhounds, so high-blooded, that I remember when five of them were confined in five different kennels on account of their ferocity. The greatest of living painters once called a greyhound, "the line of beauty in perpetual motion." Our friend's large dogs were a fine illustration of this remark. His old dog, Hector, for instance, for whom he refused a hundred guineas,—what a superb dog was Hector!—a model of grace and symmetry, necked and crested like an Arabian, and bearing himself with a stateliness and gallantry that showed some "conscience of his worth." He was the largest dog I ever saw; but so finely proportioned, that the most determined fault-finder could call him neither too long nor too heavy. There was not an inch too much of him. His colour was the purest white, entirely unspotted, except that his head was very regularly and richly marked with black. Hector was certainly a perfect beauty. But the little bitches, on which his master piqued himself still more, were not in my poor judgment so admirable. They were pretty little round, graceful things, sleek and glossy, and for the most part milk-white, with the smallest heads, and the most dove-like eyes that were ever seen. There was a

peculiar sort of innocent beauty about them, like that of a roly-poly child. They were as gentle as lambs too : all the evil spirit of the family evaporated in the gentlemen. But, to my thinking, these pretty creatures were fitter for the parlour than the field. They were strong, certainly, excellently loined, cat-footed, and chested like a war-horse ; but there was a want of length about them—a want of room, as the coursers say ; something a little, a very little inclining to the clumsy ; a dumpiness, a pointer-look. They went off like an arrow from a bow ; for the first hundred yards nothing could stand against them ; then they began to flag, to find their weight too much for their speed, and to lose ground from the shortness of the stroke. Up-hill, however, they were capital. There their compactness told. They turned with the hare, and lost neither wind nor way in the sharpest ascent. I shall never forget one single-handed course of our good friend's favourite little bitch Helen, on W. Hill. All the coursers were in the valley below, looking up to the hill side as on a moving picture. I suppose she turned the hare twenty times on a piece of green-sward not much bigger than an acre, and as steep as the roof of a house. It was an old hare, a famous hare, one that had baffled half the dogs in the county ; but she killed him ; and then, though almost as large as herself, took it up in her mouth, brought it to her

master, and laid it down at his feet. Oh how pleased he was! and what a pleasure it was to see his triumph! He did not always find W. Hill so fortunate. It is a high steep hill, of a conical shape, encircled by a mountain road winding up to the summit like a cork-screw, — a deep road dug out of the chalk, and fenced by high mounds on either side. The hares always make for this hollow way, as it is called, because it is too wide for a leap, and the dogs lose much time in mounting and descending the sharp acclivities. Very eager dogs will sometimes dare the leap, and two of our good friend's favourite greyhounds perished in the attempt in two following years. They were found dead in the hollow way. After this he took a dislike to distant coursing meetings, and sported chiefly on his own beautiful farm.

His wife was like her husband, with a difference, as they say in heraldry. Like him in looks, only thinner and paler; like him in voice and phrase, only not so loud; like him in merriment and good-humour; like him in her talent of welcoming and making happy, and being kind; like him in cherishing an abundance of pets, and in getting through with marvellous facility an astounding quantity of business and pleasure. Perhaps the quality in which they resembled each other most completely, was the happy ease and serenity of behaviour, so seldom found amongst people of the mid-

dle rank, who have usually a best manner and a worst, and whose best (that is the studied, the company manner) is so very much the worst. She was frankness itself; entirely free from prickly defiance, or bristling self-love. She never took offence or gave it; never thought of herself or of what others would think of her; had never been afflicted with the besetting sins of her station, a dread of the vulgar, or an aspiration after the genteel. Those "words of fear" had never disturbed her delightful heartiness.

Her pets were her cows, her poultry, her bees, and her flowers; chiefly her poultry, almost as numerous as the bees, and as various as the flowers. The farm-yard swarmed with peacocks, turkeys, geese, tame and wild-ducks, fowls, guinea-hens, and pigeons; besides a brood or two of favourite bantams in the green court before the door, with a little ridiculous strutter of a cock at their head, who imitated the magnificent demeanour of the great Tom of the barn-yard, just as Tom in his turn copied the fierce bearing of that warlike and terrible biped the he-turkey. I am the least in the world afraid of a turkey-cock, and used to steer clear of the turkery as often as I could. Commend me to the peaceable vanity of that jewel of a bird the peacock, sweeping his gorgeous tail along the grass, or dropping it gracefully from some low-boughed tree, whilst he turns round his crested head with the air of a birth-day

belle, to see who admires him. What a glorious creature it is! How thoroughly content with himself and with all the world!

Next to her poultry our good farmer's wife loved her flower-garden; and indeed it was of the very first water, the only thing about the place that was fine. She was a real genuine florist; valued pinks, tulips, and auriculas, for certain qualities of shape and colour, with which beauty has nothing to do; preferred black ranunculuses, and gave into all those obliquities of a triple-refined taste by which the professed florist contrives to keep pace with the vagaries of the Bibliomaniac. Of all odd fashions, that of dark, gloomy, dingy flowers, appears to me the oddest. Your true *connoisseur* now, shall prefer a deep puce hollyhock, to the gay pink blossoms which cluster round that splendid plant like a pyramid of roses. So did she. The nomenclature of her garden was more distressing still. One is never thoroughly sociable with flowers till they are naturalized as it were, christened, provided with decent, homely, well-wearing English names. Now her plants had all sorts of heathenish appellations, which,—no offence to her learning,—always sounded wrong. I liked the bees' garden best; the plot of ground immediately round their hives, filled with common flowers for their use, and literally "redolent of sweets." Bees are insects of great taste in every way, and seem often to se-

lect for beauty as much as for flavour. They have a better eye for colour than the florist. The butterfly is also a *dilettante*. Rover though he be, he generally prefers the blossoms that become him best. What a pretty picture it is, in a sunshiny autumn day, to see a bright spotted butterfly, made up of gold and purple and splendid brown, swinging on the rich flower of the china aster!

To come back to our farm. Within doors every thing went as well as without. There were no fine misses sitting before the piano, and mixing the alloy of their new-fangled tinsel with the old sterling metal; nothing but an only son excellently brought up, a fair slim youth, whose extraordinary and somewhat pensive elegance of mind and manner was thrown into fine relief by his father's loud hilarity, and harmonised delightfully with the smiling kindness of his mother. His Spensers and Thomsons, too, looked well amongst the hyacinths and geraniums that filled the windows of the little snug room in which they usually sate; a sort of after-thought, built at an angle from the house, and looking into the farm-yard. It was closely packed with favourite arm-chairs, favourite sofas, favourite tables, and a sideboard decorated with the prize-cups and collars of the greyhounds, and generally loaded with substantial work-baskets, jars of flowers, great pyramids of home-made cakes, and sparkling bottles of goose-

berry-wine, famous all over the country. The walls were covered with portraits of half a dozen greyhounds, a brace of spaniels, as large as life, an old pony, and the master and mistress of the house in half-length. She as unlike as possible, prim, mincing, delicate, in lace and satin; he so staringly and ridiculously like, that when the picture fixed its good-humoured eyes upon you as you entered the room, you were almost tempted to say—How d'ye do?—Alas! the portraits are gone now, and the originals. Death and distance have despoiled that pleasant home. The garden has lost its smiling mistress; the greyhounds their kind master; and new people, new manners, and new cares, have taken possession of the old abode of peace and plenty—the great farm-house.

L U C Y.

ABOUT a twelvemonth ago we had the misfortune to lose a very faithful and favourite female servant; one who has spoiled us for all others. Nobody can expect to meet with two Lucies. We all loved Lucy—poor Lucy! She did not die—she only married; but we were so sorry to part with her, that her wedding, which was kept at our house, was almost as tragical as a funeral; and from pure regret and affection we sum up her merits, and bemoan our loss, just as if she had really departed this life.

Lucy's praise is a most fertile theme; she united the pleasant and amusing qualities of a French soubrette with the solid excellence of an Englishwoman of the old school, and was good by contraries. In the first place, she was exceedingly agreeable to look at; remarkably pretty. She lived in our family eleven years; but, having come to us very young, was still under thirty, just in full bloom, and a very brilliant bloom it was. Her figure was rather tall, and rather large,

with delicate hands and feet, and a remarkable ease and vigour in her motions : I never saw any woman walk so fast or so well. Her face was round and dimpled, with sparkling grey eyes, black eye-brows and eye-lashes, a profusion of dark hair, very red lips, very white teeth, and a complexion that entirely took away the look of vulgarity which the breadth and flatness of her face might otherwise have given. Such a complexion, so pure, so finely grained, so healthily fair, with such a sweet rosiness, brightening and varying like her dancing eyes whenever she spoke or smiled ! When silent, she was almost pale ; but, to confess the truth, she was not often silent. Lucy liked talking, and every body liked to hear her talk. There is always great freshness and originality in an uneducated and quick-witted person, who surprises one continually by unsuspected knowledge or amusing ignorance ; and Lucy had a real talent for conversation. Her light and pleasant temper, her cleverness, her universal kindness, and the admirable address, or rather the excellent feeling, with which she contrived to unite the most perfect respect with the most cordial and affectionate interest, gave a singular charm to her prattle. No confidence or indulgence—and she was well tried with both—ever made her forget herself for a moment. All our friends used to loiter at the door or in the hall to speak to Lucy, and they miss her, and ask for her, as if she were really one

of the family. She was not less liked by her equals. Her constant simplicity and right-mindedness kept her always in her place with them as with us; and her gaiety and good-humour made her a most welcome visitor in every shop and cottàge round. She had another qualification for village society—she was an incomparable gossip, had a rare genius for picking up news, and great liberality in its diffusion. Births, deaths, marriages, casualties, quarrels, battles, scandal—nothing came amiss to her. She could have furnished a weekly paper from her own stores of facts, without once resorting for assistance to the courts of law or the two houses of parliament. She was a very charitable reporter too; threw her own sunshine into the shady places, and would hope and doubt as long as either was possible. Her fertility of intelligence was wonderful; and so early! Her news had always the bloom on it: there was no being beforehand with Lucy. It was a little mortifying when one came prepared with something very recent and surprising, something that should have made her start with astonishment, to find her fully acquainted with the story, and able to furnish you with twenty particulars that you had never heard of. But this evil had its peculiar compensation. By Lucy's aid I passed with every body, but Lucy herself, for a woman of great information, an excellent authority, an undoubted reference in all matters of gossipyry. Now I

lag miserably behind the time ; I never hear of a death till after the funeral, nor of a wedding till I read it in the papers ; and, when people talk of reports and rumours, they undo me. I should be obliged to run away from the tea-tables, if I had not taken the resolution to look wise and say nothing, and live on my old reputation. Indeed, even now, Lucy's fund is not entirely exhausted ; things have not quite done happening. I know nothing new ; but my knowledge of by-gone passages is absolute ; I can prophesy past events like a gipsy.

Scattered amongst her great merits Lucy had a few small faults, as all persons should have. She had occasionally an aptness to take offence where none was intended, and then the whole house bore audible testimony to her displeasure : she used to scour through half-a-dozen doors in a minute for the mere purpose of banging them after her. She had rather more fears than were quite convenient of ghosts and witches, and thunder, and earwigs, and various other real and unreal sights and sounds, and thought nothing of rousing half the family in the middle of the night at the first symptom of a thunder-storm or an apparition. She had a terrible genius for music, and a tremendously powerful shrill high voice. Oh ! her door-clapping was nothing to her singing ! it rang through one's head like the screams of a peacock. Lastly, she was a sad

flirt; she had about twenty lovers whilst she lived with us, probably more, but upwards of twenty she acknowledged. Her master, who watched with great amusement this uninterrupted and intricate succession of favourites, had the habit of calling her by the name of the reigning beau—Mrs. Charles, Mrs. John, Mrs. Robert; so that she has answered in her time to as many masculine appellations as would serve to supply a large family with a “commodity of good names.” Once he departed from this custom, and called her “Jenny Denison.” On her inquiring the reason, we showed her “Old Mortality,” and asked if she could not guess. “Dear me,” said she, “why Jenny Denison had only two!” Amongst Lucy’s twenty were three one-eyed lovers, like the three one-eyed calendars in the “Arabian Nights.” They were much about the same period, nearly contemporaries, and one of them had almost carried off the fair Helen. If he had had two eyes, his success would have been certain. She said yes and no, and yes again; he was a very nice young man—but that one eye—that unlucky one eye!—and the being rallied on her three calendars. There was no getting over that one eye: she said no, once more, and stood firm. And yet the pendulum might have continued to vibrate many times longer, had it not been fixed by the athletic charms of a gigantic London tailor, a superb man, really; black-haired,

black-eyed, six feet high, and large in proportion. He came to improve the country fashions, and fixed his shop-board in a cottage so near us that his garden was only divided from our lawn by a plantation full of acacias and honeysuckles, where "the air smelt wooingly." It followed of course that he should make love to Lucy, and that Lucy should listen. All was speedily settled; as soon as he should be established in a good business, which, from his incomparable talent at cutting out, nobody could doubt, they were to be married. But they had not calculated on the perversity of country taste; he was too good a workman; his suits fitted over well; his employers missed certain accustomed awkwardnesses and redundancies which passed for beauties; besides, the stiffness and tightness which distinguished the new coat of the *ancien regime*, were wanting in the make of the new. The shears of our Bond-street cutter were as powerful as the wooden sword of Harlequin; he turned his clowns into gentlemen, and their brother clodhoppers laughed at them, and they were ashamed. So the poor tailor lost his customers and his credit; and, just as he had obtained Lucy's consent to the marriage, he walked off one fair morning, and was never heard of more. Lucy's absorbing feeling on this catastrophe was astonishment, pure unmixed astonishment! One would have thought that she considered fickleness as a female privilege, and had

never heard of a man deserting a woman in her life. For three days she could only wonder; then came great indignation, and a little, a very little grief, which showed itself not so much in her words, which were chiefly such disclaimers as "I don't care! very lucky! happy escape!" and so on, as in her goings and doings, her aversion to the poor acacia grove, and even to the sight and smell of honeysuckles, her total loss of memory, and, above all, in the distaste she showed to new conquests. She paid her faithless suitor the compliment of remaining loverless for three weary months; and even when she relented a little, she admitted no fresh adorer, nothing but an old hanger-on; one not quite discarded during the tailor's reign; one who had dangled after her during the long courtship of the three calendars; one who was the handiest and most complaisant of wooers, always ready to fill up an interval, like a book, which can be laid aside when company comes in, and resumed a month afterwards at the very page and line where the reader left off. I think it was an affair of convenience and amusement on both sides. Lucy never intended to marry this commodious stopper of love-gaps; and he, though he courted her for ten mortal years, never made a direct offer, till after the banns were published between her and her present husband: then, indeed, he said he was sorry—he had hoped—was it too late? and so forth. Ah! his sorrow

was nothing to ours, and, when it came to the point, nothing to Lucy's. She cried every day for a fortnight, and had not her successor in office, the new housemaid, arrived, I do really believe that this lover would have shared the fate of the many successors to the unfortunate tailor.

I hope that her choice has been fortunate ; it is certainly very different from what we all expected. The happy man had been a neighbour, (not on the side of the acacia-trees,) and on his removal to a greater distance the marriage took place. Poor dear Lucy ! her spouse is the greatest possible contrast to herself ; ten years younger at the very least ; well-looking, but with no expression good or bad—I don't think he could smile, if he would—assuredly he never tries ; well made, but as stiff as a poker ; I dare say he never ran three yards in his life ; perfectly steady, sober, honest, and industrious ; but so young, so grave, so dull ! one of your “ demure boys,” as Falstaff calls them, “ that never come to proof.” You might guess a mile off that he was a schoolmaster, from the swelling pomposity of gait, the solemn decorum of manner, the affectation of age and wisdom, which contrast so oddly with his young unmeaning face. The moment he speaks you are certain. Nobody but a village pedagogue ever did or ever could talk like Mr. Brown ; ever displayed such elaborate politeness, such a study of

phrases, such choice words and long words, and fine words and hard words ! He speaks by the book,—the spelling book, and is civil after the fashion of the Polite Letter-Writer. He is so entirely without tact, that he does not in the least understand the impression produced by his wife's delightful manners, and interrupts her perpetually to speechify and apologise, and explain and amend. He is fond of her, nevertheless, in his own cold, slow way, and proud of her, and grateful to her friends, and a very good kind of young man altogether ; only that I cannot quite forgive him for taking Lucy away, in the first place, and making her a school-mistress in the second. She a school-mistress, a keeper of silence, a maintainer of discipline, a scolder, a punisher ! Ah ! she would rather be scolded herself ; it would be a far lighter punishment. Lucy likes her vocation as little as I do. She has not the natural love of children, which would reconcile her to the evils they cause ; and she has a real passion for cleanliness, a fiery spirit of despatch, which cannot endure the dust and litter created by the little troop on the one hand, or their tormenting slowness and stupidity on the other. She was the quickest and neatest of work-women, piqued herself on completing a shirt or a gown sooner and better than seemed possible, and was scandalized at finding such talents degraded to the ignoble occupations of tacking

a quarter of a yard of hemming for one, pinning half a seam for another, picking out the crooked stitching of a third, and working over the weak irregular burst-out button-hole of a fourth. When she first went to S——, she was strongly tempted to do all the work herself. “The children would have liked it,” said she, “and really I don’t think the mothers would have objected; they care for nothing but marking. There are seven girls now in the school working samplers to be framed. Such a waste of silk, and time, and trouble! I said to Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Smith said to me.”—Then she recounted the whole battle of the samplers, and her defeat; and then she sent for one which, in spite of her declaration that her girls never finished any thing, was quite completed (probably with a good deal of her assistance), and of which, notwithstanding her rational objection to its uselessness, Lucy was not little proud. She held it up with great delight, pointed out all the beauties, selected her own favourite parts, especially a certain square rose-bud, and the landscape at the bottom; and finally pinned it against the wall, to show the effect that it would have when framed. Really, that sampler was a superb thing in its way. First came a plain pink border; then a green border, zig-zag; then a crimson, wavy; then a brown, of a different and more complicated zig-zag; then the alphabet, great

and small, in every colour of the rainbow, followed by a row of figures, flanked on one side by a flower, name unknown, tulip, poppy, lily—something orange or scarlet, or orange-scarlet; on the other by the famous rose-bud; then diverse sentences, religious and moral:—Lucy was quite provoked with me for not being able to read them: I dare say she thought in her heart that I was as stupid as any of her scholars; but never was MS. so illegible, not even my own, as the print-work of that sampler—then, last and finest, the landscape, in all its glory. It occupied the whole narrow line at the bottom of the sampler, and was composed with great regularity. In the centre was a house of a bright scarlet, with yellow windows, a green door, and a blue roof; on one side, a man with a dog; on the other, a woman with a cat—this is Lucy's information; I should never have guessed that there was any difference, except in colour, between the man and the woman, the dog and the cat; they were in form, height, and size, alike to a thread; the man grey, the woman pink, his attendant white, and her's black. Next to these figures, on either side, rose two fir-trees from two red flower-pots, nice little round bushes of a bright green intermixed with brown stitches, which Lucy explained, not to me.—“Don't you see the fir-cones, Sir? Don't you remember how fond she used to be of picking them up in her

little basket at the dear old place? Poor thing, I thought of her all the time that I was working them! Don't you like the fir-cones?" — After this, I looked at the landscape almost as lovingly as Lucy herself.

With all her dislike to keeping school, the dear Lucy seems happy. In addition to the merciful spirit of conformity, which shapes the mind to the situation, whatever that may be, she has many sources of vanity and comfort—her house above all. It is a very respectable dwelling, finely placed on the edge of a large common, close to a high road, with a pretty flower-court before it, shaded by four horse-chesnuts cut into arches, a sashed window on either side of the door, and on the door a brass knocker, which, being securely nailed down, serves as a quiet peaceable handle for all goers, instead of the importunate and noisy use for which it was designed. Jutting out at one end of the court is a small stable; retiring back at the other, a large school-room, and behind a yard for children, pigs, and poultry, a garden, and an arbour. The inside is full of comfort; miraculously clean and orderly for a village school, and with a little touch of very allowable finery in the gay window-curtains, the cupboard full of pretty china, the handsome chairs, the bright mahogany table, the shining tea-urn, and brilliant tea-tray that decorate the parlour.

What a pleasure it is to see Lucy presiding in that parlour, in all the glory of her honest affection and her warm hospitality, making tea for the three guests whom she loves best in the world, vaunting with courteous pride her home-made bread and her fresh butter, yet thinking nothing good enough for the occasion; smiling and glowing, and looking the very image of beautiful happiness.—Such a moment almost consoles us for losing her.

Lucy's pleasure is in her house; mine is in its situation. The common on which it stands is one of a series of heathy hills, or rather a high table land, pierced in one part by a ravine of marshy ground, filled with alder bushes, growing larger and larger as the valley widens, and at last mixing with the fine old oaks of the forest of P——. Nothing can be more delightful than to sit on the steep brow of the hill, amongst the fragrant heath flowers, the blue-bells, and the wild thyme, and look upon the sea of trees spreading out beneath us; the sluggish water just peeping from amid the alders, giving brightly back the bright blue sky; and, farther down, herds of rough ponies, and of small stunted cows, the wealth of the poor, coming up from the forest. I have sometimes seen two hundred of these cows together, each belonging to a different person, and distinguishing and obeying the call of its milker. All the boundaries of this heath

are beautiful. On one side is the hanging coppice, where the lily of the valley grows so plentifully amongst broken ridges and fox-earths, and the roots of pollard-trees. On another are the immense fir plantations of Mr. B., whose balmy odour hangs heavily in the air, or comes sailing on the breeze like smoke across the landscape. Farther on, beyond the pretty parsonage-house, with its short avenue, its fish-ponds, and the magnificent poplars which form a landmark for many miles round, rise the rock-like walls of the old city of S——, one of the most perfect Roman remains now existing in England. The wall can be traced all round, rising sometimes to a height of twenty feet, over a deep narrow slip of meadow land, once the ditch, and still full of aquatic flowers. The ground within rises level with the top of the wall, which is of grey stone, crowned with the finest forest trees, whose roots seem interlaced with the old masonry, and covered with wreaths of ivy, brambles, and a hundred other trailing plants. Close by one of the openings, which mark the site of the gates, is a graduated terrace, called by antiquaries the Amphitheatre, which commands a rich and extensive view, and is backed by the village church, and an old farm-house,—the sole buildings in that once populous city, whose streets are now traced only by the blighted and withered appearance of the ripening corn. Roman coins and urns are

often ploughed up there, and it is a favourite haunt of the lovers of "hoar antiquity." But the beauty of the place is independent even of its noble associations. The very heart expands in the deep verdure and perfect loneliness of that narrow winding valley, fenced on one side by steep coppices or its own tall irregular hedge, on the other by the venerable crag-like wall, whose proud coronet of trees, its jutting ivy, its huge twisted thorns, its briery festoons, and the deep caves where the rabbits burrow, make the old bulwark seem no work of man, but a majestic piece of nature. As a picture it is exquisite. Nothing can be finer than the mixture of those varied greens so crisp and life-like, with the crumbling grey stone; nothing more perfectly in harmony with the solemn beauty of the place than the deep cooings of the wood-pigeons, who abound in the walls. I know no pleasure so intense, so soothing, so apt to bring sweet tears into the eyes, or to awaken thoughts that "lie too deep for tears," as a walk round the old city on a fine summer evening. A ride to S—— was always delightful to me, even before it became the residence of Lucy; it is now my prime festival.

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

THE FIRST PRIMROSE.

MARCH 6th.—Fine March weather : boisterous, blustering, much wind and squalls of rain ; and yet the sky where the clouds are swept away deliciously blue, with snatches of sunshine, bright, and clear, and healthful, and the roads, in spite of the slight glittering showers, crisply dry. Altogether, the day is tempting, very tempting. It will not do for the dear common, that windmill of a walk ; but the close sheltered lanes at the bottom of the hill, which keep out just enough of the stormy air, and let in all the sun, will be delightful. Past our old house, and round by the winding lanes, and the workhouse, and across the lea, and so into the turnpike-road again,—that is our route for to-day. Forth we set, Mayflower and I, rejoicing in the sunshine, and still more in the wind, which gives such an intense feeling of existence, and, co-operating with brisk motion, sets our blood and our spirits in a glow.

For mere physical pleasure, there is nothing perhaps equal to the enjoyment of being drawn, in a light carriage, against such a wind as this, by a blood horse at his height of speed. Walking comes next to it; but walking is not quite so luxurious or so spiritual, not quite so much what one fancies of flying, or being carried above the clouds in a balloon.

Nevertheless, a walk is a good thing; especially under this southern hedgerow, where nature is just beginning to live again: the periwinkles, with their starry blue flowers, and their shining myrtle-like leaves, garlanding the bushes; woodbines and elder-trees pushing out their small swelling buds; and grasses and mosses springing forth in every variety of brown and green. Here we are at the corner where four lanes meet, or rather where a passable road of stones and gravel crosses an impassable one of beautiful but treacherous turf, and where the small white farm-house, scarcely larger than a cottage, and the well-stocked rick-yard behind, tell of comfort and order, but leave all unguessed the great riches of the master. How he became so rich is almost a puzzle; for, though the farm be his own, it is not large; and, though prudent and frugal on ordinary occasions, farmer Barnard is no miser. His horses, dogs, and pigs, are the best kept in the parish,—May herself, although her beauty be injured by her fatness, half envies the plight of his bitch Fly: his wife's gowns and

shawls cost as much again as any shawls or gowns in the village : his dinner parties (to be sure they are not frequent) display twice the ordinary quantity of good things—two couples of ducks, two dishes of green peas, two turkey poults, two gammons of bacon, two plum-puddings ; moreover, he keeps a single-horse chaise, and has built and endowed a Methodist chapel. Yet is he the richest man in these parts. Every thing prospers with him. Money drifts about him like snow. He looks like a rich man. There is a sturdy squareness of face and figure ; a good-humoured obstinacy ; a civil importance. He never boasts of his wealth, or gives himself undue airs ; but nobody can meet him at market or vestry without finding out immediately that he is the richest man there. They have no child to all this money ; but there is an adopted nephew, a fine spirited lad, who may, perhaps, some day or other, play the part of a fountain to the reservoir.

Now turn up the wide road till we come to the open common, with its park-like trees, its beautiful stream, wandering and twisting along, and its rural bridge. Here we turn again, past that other white farm-house, half hidden by the magnificent elms which stand before it. Ah ! riches dwell not there ; but there is found the next best thing—an industrious and light-hearted poverty. Twenty years ago Rachel Hilton was the prettiest and merriest lass in the country. Her father, an

old game-keeper, had retired to a village ale-house, where his good beer, his social humour, and his black-eyed daughter, brought much custom. She had lovers by the score; but Joseph White, the dashing and lively son of an opulent farmer, carried off the fair Rachel. They married and settled here, and here they live still; as merrily as ever, with fourteen children of all ages and sizes, from nineteen years to nineteen months, working harder than any people in the parish, and enjoying themselves more. I would match them for labour and laughter against any family in England. She is a blithe, jolly dame, whose beauty has amplified into comeliness: he is tall, and thin, and bony, with sinews like whipcord, a strong lively voice, a sharp weather-beaten face, and eyes and lips that smile and brighten when he speaks into a most contagious hilarity. They are very poor, and I often wish them richer; but I don't know—perhaps it might put them out.

Quite close to farmer White's is a little ruinous cottage, white-washed once, and now in a sad state of betweenity, where dangling stockings and shirts swelled by the wind, drying in a neglected garden, give signal of a washerwoman. There dwells, at present in single blessedness, Betty Adams, the wife of our sometime gardener. I never saw any one who so much reminded me in person of that lady whom every body knows, Mistress Meg Merrilies;—as tall, as grizzled, as stately, as dark, as

gipsy-looking, bonneted and gowned like her prototype, and almost as oracular. Here the resemblance ceases. Mrs. Adams is a perfectly honest, industrious, pains-taking person, who earns a good deal of money by washing and charing, and spends it in other luxuries than tidiness,—in green tea, and gin, and snuff. Her husband lives in a great family ten miles off. He is a capital gardener—or rather he would be so, if he were not too ambitious. He undertakes all things, and finishes none. But a smooth tongue, a knowing look, and a great capacity of labour, carry him through. Let him but like his ale and his master, and he will do work enough for four. Give him his own way, and his full quantum, and nothing comes amiss to him.

Ah, May is bounding forward! Her silly heart leaps at the sight of the old place—and so, in good truth, does mine. What a pretty place it was,—or rather, how pretty I thought it! I suppose I should have thought any place so where I had spent eighteen happy years. But it was really pretty. A large, heavy, white house, in the simplest style, surrounded by fine oaks and elms and tall massy plantations shaded down into a beautiful lawn, by wild overgrown shrubs, bowery acacias, ragged sweet-briars, promontories of dogwood, and Portugal laurel, and bays overhung by laburnum and bird-cherry: a long piece of water letting light into the picture, and looking just like a natural

stream, the banks as rude and wild as the shrubbery, interspersed with broom, and furze, and bramble, and pollard oaks covered with ivy and honeysuckle; the whole enclosed by an old mossy park paling, and terminating in a series of rich meadows, richly planted. This is an exact description of the home which, three years ago, it nearly broke my heart to leave. What a tearing up by the root it was! I have pitied cabbage plants and celery, and all transplantable things ever since; though, in common with them and with other vegetables, the first agony of the transportation being over, I have taken such firm and tenacious hold of my new soil, that I would not for the world be pulled up again, even to be restored to the old beloved ground; —not even if its beauty were undiminished, which is by no means the case; for in those three years it has thrice changed masters, and every successive possessor has brought the curse of improvement upon the place: so that between filling up the water to cure dampness, cutting down trees to let in prospects, planting to keep them out, shutting up windows to darken the inside of the house, (by which means one end looks precisely as an eight of spades would do that should have the misfortune to lose one of his corner pips,) and building colonnades to lighten the out, added to a general clearance of pollards, and brambles; and ivy, and honeysuckles, and park palings, and irregular shrubs, the

poor place is so transmogrified, that if it had its old looking-glass, the water, back again, it would not know its own face. And yet I love to haunt round about it: so does May. Her particular attraction is a certain broken bank full of rabbit burrows, into which she insinuates her long pliant head and neck, and tears her pretty feet by vain scratchings: mine is a warm sunny hedgerow, in the same remote field, famous for early flowers. Never was a spot more variously flowery: primroses yellow, lilac, white, violets of either hue, cowslips, oxlips, arums, orchises, wild hyacinths, ground ivy, pansies, strawberries, heart's-ease, formed a small part of the Flora of that wild hedgerow. How profusely they covered the sunny open slope under the weeping birch, "the lady of the woods"—and how often have I started to see the early innocent brown snake, who loved the spot as well as I did, winding along the young blossoms, or rustling amongst the fallen leaves! There are primrose leaves already, and short green buds, but no flowers; not even in that furze cradle so full of roots, where they used to blow as in a basket. No, my May, no rabbits! no primroses! We may as well get over the gate into the woody winding lane, which will bring us home again.

Here we are making the best of our way between the old elms that arch so solemnly over head, dark and sheltered even now. They say that a spirit haunts this

deep pool—a white lady without a head. I cannot say that I have seen her, often as I have paced this lane at deep midnight, to hear the nightingales, and look at the glow-worms;—but there, better and rarer than a thousand ghosts, dearer even than nightingales or glow-worms, there is a primrose, the first of the year; a tuft of primroses, springing in yonder sheltered nook, from the mossy roots of an old willow, and living again in the clear bright pool. Oh, how beautiful they are—three fully blown and two bursting buds! how glad I am I came this way! They are not to be reached. Even Jack Rapley's love of the difficult and the unattainable would fail him here: May herself could not stand on that steep bank. So much the better. Who would wish to disturb them? There they live in their innocent and fragrant beauty, sheltered from the storms, and rejoicing in the sunshine, and looking as if they could feel their happiness. Who would disturb them? Oh, how glad I am I came this way home!

BRAMLEY MAYING.

MR. GEOFFREY CRAYON has, in his delightful but somewhat fanciful writings, brought into general view many old sports and customs, some of which, indeed, still linger about the remote counties, familiar as local peculiarities to their inhabitants, whilst the greater part lie buried in books of the Elizabethan age, known only to the curious in English literature. One rural custom, which would have enchanted him, and which prevails in the north of Hampshire, he has not noticed, and probably does not know. Did any of my readers ever hear of a Maying? Let not any notions of chimney-sweepers soil the imagination of the gay Londoner! A country Maying is altogether a different affair from the street exhibitions which mix so much pity with our mirth, and do the heart good, perhaps, but not by gladdening it. A country Maying is a meeting of the lads and lasses of two or three parishes, who assemble in certain erections of green boughs called May-houses,

to dance and——but I am going to tell all about it in due order, and must not forestall my description.

Last year we went to Bramley Maying. There had been two or three such merry-makings before in that inaccessible neighbourhood, where the distance from large towns, the absence of great houses, and the consequent want of all decent roads, together with a country of peculiar wildness and beauty, combine to produce a sort of modern Arcadia. We had intended to assist at a Maying in the forest of Pamber, thinking that the deep glades of that fine woodland scenery would be more congenial to the spirit of old English merriment, as it breathed more of Robin Hood and Maid Marian than a mere village green—to say nothing of its being of the two more accessible by four-footed and two-wheeled conveyances. But the Pamber day had been suffered to pass, and Bramley was the last Maying of the season. So to Bramley we went.

As we had a considerable distance to go, we set out about noon, intending to return to dinner at six. Never was a day more congenial to a happy purpose! It was a day made for country weddings and dances on the green—a day of dazzling light, of ardent sunshine falling on hedgerows and meadows fresh with spring showers. You might almost see the grass grow and the leaves expand under the influence of that vivifying

warmth; and we passed through the well-known and beautiful scenery of W. Park, and the pretty village of M., with a feeling of new admiration, as if we had never before felt their charms; so gloriously did the trees in their young leaves, the grass springing beneath them, the patches of golden broom and deeper furze, the cottages covered with roses, the blooming orchards, and the light snowy sprays of the cherry-trees tossing their fair blossoms across the deep blue sky, pour upon the eye the full magic of colour. On we passed gaily and happily as far as we knew our way—perhaps a little farther, for the place of our destination was new to both of us, when we had the luck, good or bad, to meet with a director in the person of the butcher of M. My companion is known to most people within a circuit of ten miles; so we had ready attention and most civil guidance from the man of beef and mutton—a prodigious person, almost as big as a prize ox, as rosy and jovial-looking as Falstaff himself, who was standing in the road with a slender shrewd-looking boy, apt and ready enough to have passed for the page. He soon gave us the proper, customary, and unintelligible directions as to lanes and turnings—first to the right, then to the left, then round Farmer Jennings's close, then across the Holy Brook, then to the right again—till at last, seeing us completely bewildered, he offered to send the page, who was going our way for half a mile

to carry out a shoulder of veal, to attend us to that distance as a guide; an offer gratefully accepted by all parties, especially the boy, whom we relieved of his burthen and took up behind, where he swang in an odd but apparently satisfactory posture, between running and riding. Whilst he continued with us, we fell into no mistakes; but at last he and the shoulder of veal reached their place of destination; and, after listening to a repetition, or perhaps a variation, of the turns right and left which were to conduct us to Bramley-green, we and our little guide parted.

On we went, twisting and turning through a labyrinth of lanes, getting deeper and deeper every moment, till at last, after many doubtings, we became fairly convinced that we had lost our way. Not a soul was in the fields; not a passenger in the road; not a cottage by the roadside: so on we went—I am afraid to say how far (for when people have lost their way, they are not the most accurate measurers of distance)—till we came suddenly on a small farm-house, and saw at once that the road we had trodden led to that farm, and thither only. The solitary farm-house had one solitary inmate, a smiling middle-aged woman, who came to us and offered her services with the most alert civility:—“All her boys and girls were gone to the Maying,” she said, “and she remained to keep house.”—“The Maying! We were near Bramley then?”—“Only two miles the

nearest way across the fields—were we going?—she would see to the horse—we should soon be there, only over that stile and then across that field, and then turn to the right, and then take the next turning——no! the next but one to the left.”—Right and left again for two miles over those deserted fields!—Right and left! we shuddered at the words. “Is there no carriage-road?—Where are we?”—“At Silchester, close to the walls, only half a mile from the church.”—“At Silchester!” and in ten minutes we had said a thankful farewell to our kind informant, had retraced our steps a little, had turned up another lane, and found ourselves at the foot of that commanding spot which antiquaries call the amphitheatre, close under the walls of the Roman city, and in full view of an old acquaintance, the schoolmaster of Silchester, who happened to be there in his full glory, playing the part of Cicerone to a party of ladies, and explaining far more than he knows, or than any one knows, of streets, and gates, and sites of temples, which, by the bye, the worthy pedagogue usually calls parish-churches. I never was so glad to see him in my life, never thought he could have spoken with so much sense and eloquence as were comprised in the two words “straight forward,” by which he answered our inquiry as to the road to Bramley.

And forward we went by a way beautiful beyond de-

scription: a road bounded on one side by every variety of meadow, and corn-field, and rich woodland; on the other by the rock-like walls of the old city, crowning an abrupt magnificent bank of turf, broken by fragments, crags as it were, detached from the ruin, and young trees, principally ash, with silver stems standing out in picturesque relief from the green slope, and itself crowned with every sort of vegetation, from the rich festoons of briar and ivy, which garlanded its side, to the venerable oaks and beeches which nodded on its summit. I never saw any thing so fine in my life. To be sure, we nearly broke our necks. Even I, who, having been overset astonishingly often, without any harm happening, have acquired, from frequency of escape, the confidence of escaping, and the habit of not caring for that particular danger, which is, I suppose, what in a man and in battle would be called courage; even I was glad enough to get out, and do all I could towards wriggling the gig round the rock-like stones, or sometimes helping to lift a wheel over the smaller impediments. We escaped that danger, and left the venerable walls behind us.—But I am losing my way here, too; I must loiter on the road no longer. Our other delays of a broken bridge—a bog—another wrong turning—and a meeting with a loaded waggon, in a lane too narrow to pass—all this must remain untold.

At last we reached a large farm-house at Bramley;

another mile remained to the Green, but that was impassable. Nobody thinks of riding at Bramley. The late lady of the manor, when at rare and uncertain intervals she resided for a few weeks at her house of B. R., used, in visiting her only neighbour, to drive her coach and four through her farmers' ploughed fields. We must walk : but the appearance of gay crowds of rustics, all passing along one path, gave assurance that this time we should not lose our way. Oh, what a pretty path it was ! along one sunny sloping field, up and down, dotted with trees like a park ; then across a deep shady lane, with cows loitering and cropping grass from the banks ; then up a long narrow meadow, in the very pride and vigour of its greenness, richly bordered by hedgerow timber, and terminating in the church-yard, and a little country church.

Bramley church is well worth seeing. It contains that rare thing, a monument fine in itself, and finer in its situation. We had heard of it, and in spite of the many delays we had experienced, could not resist the temptation of sending one of the loiterers, who seemed to stand in the church yard as a sort of out-guard to the Maying, to the vicar's house for the key. Prepared as we had been to see something unusual, we were very much struck. The church is small, simple, decaying, almost ruinous ; but, as you turn from the

entrance into the centre aisle, and advance up to the altar, your eye falls on a lofty recess, branching out like a chapel on one side, and seen through a Gothic arch. It is almost paved with monumental brasses of the proud family of B., who have possessed the surrounding property from the time of the Conqueror ; and in the centre of the large open space stands a large monument, surrounded by steps, on which reclines a figure of a dying man, with a beautiful woman leaning over him, full of a lovely look of anxiety and tenderness. The figures are very fine ; but that which makes the grace and glory of this remarkable piece of sculpture is its being backed by an immense Gothic window, nearly the whole size of the recess, entirely composed of old stained glass. I do not know the story which the artist, in the series of pictures, intended to represent ; but there they are, the gorgeous, glorious colours—reds, and purples, and greens, glowing like an anemone bed in the sunshine, or like one of the windows made of amethysts and rubies in the Arabian Tales, and throwing out the monumental figures with an effect almost magical. The parish clerk was at the Maying, and we had only an unlettered rustic to conduct us, so that I do not even know the name of the sculptor—he must have a strange mingled feeling if ever he saw his work in its present home—delight that it looks so well, and re-

gret that there is no one to look at it. That monument alone was worth losing our way for.

But cross two fields more, and up a quiet lane, and we are at the Maying, announced afar off by the merry sound of music, and the merrier clatter of childish voices. Here we are at the Green; a little turfy spot, where three roads meet, close shut in by hedgerows, with a pretty white cottage, and its long slip of a garden at one angle. I had no expectation of scenery so compact, so like a glade in a forest; it is quite a cabinet picture, with green trees for the frame. In the midst grows a superb horse-chesnut, in the full glory of its flowery pyramids, and from the trunk of the chesnut the May-houses commence. They are covered alleys built of green boughs, decorated with garlands and great bunches of flowers, the gayest that blow—lilacs, Guelder-roses, pionies, tulips, stocks—hanging down like chandeliers among the dancers; for of dancers, gay dark-eyed young girls in straw bonnets and white gowns, and their lovers in their Sunday attire, the May-houses were full. The girls had mostly the look of extreme youth, and danced well and quietly like ladies—too much so: I should have been glad to see less elegance and more enjoyment; and their partners, though not altogether so graceful, were as decorous and as indifferent as real gentlemen. It was quite like a ball-room, as pretty and almost as

dull. Outside was the fun. It is the outside, the upper gallery of the world, that has that good thing. There were children laughing, eating, trying to cheat, and being cheated, round an ancient and practised vender of oranges and gingerbread ; and on the other side of the tree lay a merry groupe of old men, in coats almost as old as themselves, and young ones in no coats at all, excluded from the dance by the disgrace of a smock-frock. Who would have thought of etiquette finding its way into the May-houses ! That groupe would have suited Teniers ; it smoked and drank a little, but it laughed a great deal more. There were a few decent matronly looking women, too, sitting in a cluster ; and young mothers strolling about with infants in their arms ; and ragged boys peeping through the boughs at the dancers ; and the bright sun shining gloriously on all this innocent happiness. Oh what a pretty sight it was !—worth losing our way for—worth losing our dinner—both which events happened ; whilst a party of friends, who were to have joined us, were far more unlucky ; for they not only lost their way and their dinner, but rambled all day about the country, and never reached Bramley Maying.

C O U S I N M A R Y .

ABOUT four years ago, passing a few days with the highly educated daughters of some friends in this neighbourhood, I found domesticated in the family a young lady, whom I shall call as they called her, Cousin Mary. She was about eighteen, not beautiful perhaps, but lovely certainly to the fullest extent of that loveliest word—as fresh as a rose; as fair as a lily; with lips like winter berries, dimpled, smiling lips; and eyes of which nobody could tell the colour, they danced so incessantly in their own gay light. Her figure was tall, round, and slender; exquisitely well proportioned it must have been, for in all attitudes, (and in her innocent gaiety, she was scarcely ever two minutes in the same) she was grace itself. She was, in short, the very picture of youth, health, and happiness. No one could see her without being prepossessed in her favour. I took a fancy to her the moment she entered the room; and it increased every hour in spite of, or rather perhaps for, certain de-

ficiencies, which caused poor Cousin Mary to be held exceedingly cheap by her accomplished relatives.

She was the youngest daughter of an officer of rank, dead long ago ; and his sickly widow having lost by death, or that other death, marriage, all her children but this, could not, from very fondness, resolve to part with her darling for the purpose of acquiring the commonest instruction. She talked of it, indeed, now and then, but she only talked ; so that, in this age of universal education, Mary C. at eighteen exhibited the extraordinary phenomenon of a young woman of high family, whose acquirements were limited to reading, writing, needle-work, and the first rules of arithmetic. The effect of this let-alone system, combined with a careful seclusion from all improper society, and a perfect liberty in her country rambles, acting upon a mind of great power and activity, was the very reverse of what might have been predicted. It had produced not merely a delightful freshness and originality of manner and character, a piquant ignorance of those things of which one is tired to death, but knowledge, positive, accurate, and various knowledge. She was, to be sure, wholly unaccomplished ; knew nothing of quadrilles, though her every motion was dancing ; nor a note of music, though she used to warble like a bird sweet snatches of old songs, as she skipped up and down the house ;

nor of painting, except as her taste had been formed by a minute acquaintance with nature into an intense feeling of art. She had that real extra sense, an eye for colour, too, as well as an ear for music. Not one in twenty—not one in a hundred of our sketching and copying ladies could love and appreciate a picture where there was colour and mind, a picture by Claude, or by our English Claudes Wilson and Hoffland, as she could—for she loved landscape best, because she understood it best—it was a portrait of which she knew the original. Then her needle was in her hands almost a pencil. I never knew such an embroidress—she would sit “printing her thoughts on lawn,” till the delicate creation vied with the snowy tracery, the fantastic carving of hoar frost, the richness of Gothic architecture, or of that which so much resembles it, the luxuriant fancy of old point lace. That was her only accomplishment, and a rare artist she was—muslin and net were her canvas. She had no French either, not a word; no Italian; but then her English was racy, unhackneyed, proper to the thought to a degree that only original thinking could give. She had not much reading, except of the Bible and Shakspeare, and Richardson’s novels, in which she was learned; but then her powers of observation were sharpened and quickened, in a very unusual degree, by the leisure and opportunity afforded for their de-

velopment, at a time of life when they are most acute. She had nothing to distract her mind. Her attention was always awake and alive. She was an excellent and curious naturalist, merely because she had gone into the fields with her eyes open ; and knew all the details of rural management, domestic or agricultural, as well as the peculiar habits and modes of thinking of the peasantry, simply because she had lived in the country, and made use of her ears. Then she was fanciful, recollective, new ; drew her images from the real objects, not from their shadows in books. In short, to listen to her, and the young ladies her companions, who, accomplished to the height, had trodden the education-mill till they all moved in one step, had lost sense in sound, and ideas in words, was enough to make us turn masters and governesses out of doors, and leave our daughters and grand-daughters to Mrs. C.'s system of non-instruction. I should have liked to meet with another specimen, just to ascertain whether the peculiar charm and advantage arose from the quick and active mind of this fair Ignorant, or was really the natural and inevitable result of the training ; but, alas ! to find more than one unaccomplished young lady, in this accomplished age, is not to be hoped for. So I admired and envied ; and her fair kinswomen pitied and scorned, and tried to teach ; and Mary, never made for a learner, and as full of animal

spirits as a school-boy in the holidays, sang, and laughed, and skipped about from morning to night.

It must be confessed, as a counter-balance to her other perfections, that the dear Cousin Mary was, as far as great natural modesty and an occasional touch of shyness would let her, the least in the world of a romp! She loved to toss about children, to jump over stiles, to scramble through hedges, to climb trees; and some of her knowledge of plants and birds may certainly have arisen from her delight in these boyish amusements. And which of us has not found that the strongest, the healthiest, and most flourishing acquirement has arisen from pleasure or accident, has been in a manner self-sown, like an oak of the forest?—Oh she was a sad romp; as skittish as a wild colt, as uncertain as a butterfly, as uncatchable as a swallow! But her great personal beauty, the charm, grace, and lightness of her movements, and above all, her evident innocence of heart, were bribes to indulgence which no one could withstand. I never heard her blamed by any human being. The perfect unrestraint of her attitudes, and the exquisite symmetry of her form, would have rendered her an invaluable study for a painter. Her daily doings would have formed a series of pictures. I have seen her scudding through a shallow rivulet, with her petticoats caught up just a little above the ankle, like a young Diana, and a bounding, skimming, enjoying

motion, as if native to the element, which might have become a Naiad. I have seen her on the topmost round of a ladder, with one foot on the roof of a house, flinging down the grapes that no one else had nerve enough to reach, laughing, and garlanded, and crowned with vine-leaves, like a Bacchante. But the prettiest combination of circumstances under which I ever saw her, was driving a donkey cart up a hill one sunny windy day, in September. It was a gay party of young women, some walking, some in open carriages of different descriptions, bent to see a celebrated prospect from a hill called the Ridges. The ascent was by a steep narrow lane, cut deeply between sand-banks, crowned with high, feathery hedges. The road and its picturesque banks lay bathed in the golden sunshine, whilst the autumnal sky, intensely blue, appeared at the top as through an arch. The hill was so steep that we had all dismounted, and left our different vehicles in charge of the servants below; but Mary, to whom, as incomparably the best charioteer, the conduct of a certain non-descript machine, a sort of donkey curricule, had fallen, determined to drive a delicate little girl, who was afraid of the walk, to the top of the eminence. She jumped out for the purpose, and we followed, watching and admiring her as she won her way up the hill: now tugging at the donkeys in front with her bright face towards them and us, and springing along back-

wards—now pushing the chaise from behind—now running by the side of her steeds, patting and caressing them—now soothing the half-frightened child—now laughing, nodding, and shaking her little whip at us—darting about like some winged creature—till at last she stopped at the top of the ascent, and stood for a moment on the summit, her straw bonnet blown back, and held on only by the strings; her brown hair playing on the wind in long natural ringlets; her complexion becoming every moment more splendid from exertion, redder and whiter; her eyes and her smile brightening and dimpling; her figure in its simple white gown, strongly relieved by the deep blue sky, and her whole form seeming to dilate before our eyes. There she stood under the arch formed by two meeting elms, a Hebe, a Psyche, a perfect goddess of youth and joy. The Ridges are very fine things altogether, especially the part to which we were bound, a turfy breezy spot, sinking down abruptly like a rock into a wild foreground of heath and forest, with a magnificent command of distant objects;—but we saw nothing that day like the figure on the top of the hill.

After this I lost sight of her for a long time. She was called suddenly home by the dangerous illness of her mother, who, after languishing for some months, died; and Mary went to live with a sister much older than herself, and richly married in a manufacturing

town, where she languished in smoke, confinement, dependence, and display, (for her sister was a match-making lady, a manoeuvrer,) for about a twelvemonth. She then left her house and went into Wales—as a governess! Imagine the astonishment caused by this intelligence amongst us all; for I myself, though admiring the untaught damsel almost as much as I loved her, should certainly never have dreamed of her as a teacher. However, she remained in the rich baronet's family where she had commenced her vocation. They liked her apparently,—there she was; and again nothing was heard of her for many months, until, happening to call on the friends at whose house I had originally met her, I espied her fair blooming face, a rose amongst roses, at the drawing-room window,—and instantly with the speed of light was met and embraced by her at the hall-door.

There was not the slightest perceptible difference in her déportment. She still bounded like a fawn, and laughed and clapped her hands like an infant. She was not a day older, or graver, or wiser, since we parted. Her post of tutoress had at least done *her* no harm, whatever might have been the case with her pupils. The more I looked at her the more I wondered; and after our mutual expressions of pleasure had a little subsided, I could not resist the temptation of saying —“ So you are really a governess ? ” —“ Yes. ” —“ And

you continue in the same family?"—"Yes."—"And you like your post?"—"O yes! yes!"—But, my dear Mary, what could induce you to go?"—"Why, they wanted a governess, so I went."—"But what could induce them to keep you?" The perfect gravity and earnestness with which this question was put set her laughing, and the laugh was echoed back from a group at the end of the room, which I had not before noticed—an elegant man in the prime of life showing a portfolio of rare prints to a fine girl of twelve, and a rosy boy of seven, evidently his children. "Why did they keep me? Ask them," replied Mary, turning towards them with an arch smile. "We kept her to teach her ourselves," said the young lady. "We kept her to play cricket with us," said her brother. "We kept her to marry," said the gentleman, advancing gaily to shake hands with me. "She was a bad governess, perhaps; but she is an excellent wife—that is her true vocation." And so it is. She is, indeed, an excellent wife; and assuredly a most fortunate one. I never saw happiness so sparkling or so glowing; never saw such devotion to a bride, or such fondness for a step-mother, as Sir W. S. and his lovely children show to the sweet Cousin Mary.

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

VIOLETING.

MARCH 27th.—It is a dull grey morning, with a dewy feeling in the air; fresh, but not windy; cool, but not cold;—the very day for a person newly arrived from the heat, the glare, the noise, and the fever of London, to plunge into the remotest labyrinths of the country, and regain the repose of mind, the calmness of heart, which has been lost in that great Babel. I must go violeting—it is a necessity—and I must go alone: the sound of a voice, even my Lizzy's, the touch of May-flower's head, even the bounding of her elastic foot, would disturb the serenity of feeling which I am trying to recover. I shall go quite alone, with my little basket, twisted like a bee-hive, which I love so well, because *she* gave it to me, and keep sacred to violets and to those whom I love; and I shall get out of the high road the moment I can. I would not meet any one just now, even of those whom I best like to meet.

Ha!—Is not that group—a gentleman on a blood horse, a lady keeping pace with him so gracefully and easily—see how prettily her veil waves in the wind created by her own rapid motion!—and that gay, gallant boy, on the gallant white Arabian, curveting at their side, but ready to spring before them every instant—is not that chivalrous-looking party, Mr. and Mrs. M. and dear B.? No! the servant is in a different livery. It is some of the ducal family, and one of their young Etonians. I may go on. I shall meet no one now; for I have fairly left the road, and am crossing the lea by one of those wandering paths, amidst the gorse and the heath and the low broom, which the sheep and lambs have made—a path turfy, elastic, thymy, and sweet even at this season.

We have the good fortune to live in an unenclosed parish, and may thank the wise obstinacy of two or three sturdy farmers, and the lucky unpopularity of a ranting madcap lord of the manor, for preserving the delicious green patches, the islets of wilderness amidst cultivation, which form perhaps the peculiar beauty of English scenery. The common that I am passing now—the lea, as it is called—is one of the loveliest of these favoured spots. It is a little sheltered scene, retiring, as it were, from the village; sunk amidst higher lands—hills would be almost too grand a word; edged on one side by one gay high road, and intersected by

another ; and surrounded by a most picturesque confusion of meadows, cottages, farms, and orchards ; with a great pond in one corner, unusually bright and clear, giving a delightful cheerfulness and daylight to the picture. The swallows haunt that pond ; so do the children. There is a merry group round it now ; I have seldom seen it without one. Children love water, clear, bright, sparkling water ; it excites and feeds their curiosity ; it is motion and life.

The path that I am treading leads to a less lively spot, to that large heavy building on one side of the common, whose solid wings, jutting out far beyond the main body, occupy three sides of a square, and give a cold shadowy look to the court. On one side is a gloomy garden, with an old man digging in it, laid out in straight dark beds of vegetables, potatoes, cabbages, onions, beans ; all earthy and mouldy as a newly dug grave. Not a flower or a flowering shrub ! Not a rose-tree or a currant-bush ! Nothing but for sober melancholy use. Oh how different from the long irregular slips of the cottage-gardens, with their gay bunches of polyanthuses and crocuses, their wall-flowers, sending sweet odours through the narrow casement, and their gooseberry-trees, bursting into a brilliancy of leaf, whose vivid greenness has the effect of a blossom on the eye ! Oh how different ! On the other side of this gloomy abode is a meadow of

that deep intense emerald hue, which denotes the presence of stagnant water, surrounded by willows at regular distances, and, like the garden, separated from the common by a wide, moat-like ditch. That is the parish workhouse. All about it is solid, substantial, useful;—but so dreary! so cold! so dark! There are children in the court, and yet all is silent. I always hurry past that place, as if it were a prison. Restraint, sickness, age, extreme poverty, misery, which I have no power to remove or alleviate,—these are the ideas, the feelings, which the sight of those walls excites; yet, perhaps, if not certainly, they contain less of that extreme desolation than the morbid fancy is apt to paint. There will be found order, cleanliness, food, clothing, warmth, refuge for the homeless, medicine and attendance for the sick, rest and sufficiency for old age, and sympathy, the true and active sympathy which the poor show to the poor, for the unhappy. There may be worse places than a parish workhouse—and yet I hurry past it. The feeling, the prejudice will not be controlled.

The end of the dreary garden edges off into a close-sheltered lane, wandering and winding, like a rivulet, in gentle “sinuosities,” (to use a word once applied by Mr. Wilberforce to the Thames at Henley,) amidst green meadows, all alive with cattle, sheep, and beautiful lambs, in the very spring and pride of their tot-

tering prettiness : or fields of arable land, more lively still with troops of stooping bean-setters, women and children, in all varieties of costume and colour ; and ploughs and harrows, with their whistling boys and steady carters, going through, with a slow and plodding industry, the main business of this busy season. What work bean-setting is ! What a reverse of the position assigned to man to distinguish him from the beasts of the field ! Only think of stooping for six, eight, ten hours a day, drilling holes in the earth with a little stick, and then dropping in the beans one by one. They are paid according to the quantity they plant ; and some of the poor women used to be accused of clumping them—that is to say, dropping more than one bean into a hole. It seems to me, considering the temptation, that not to clump is to be at the very pinnacle of human virtue.

Another turn in the lane, and we come to the old house standing amongst the high elms—the old farmhouse, which always, I don't know why, carries back my imagination to Shakspeare's days. It is a long, low, irregular building, with one room, at an angle from the house, covered with ivy, fine white-veined ivy ; the first floor of the main building projecting and supported by oaken beams, and one of the windows below, with its old casement and long narrow panes, forming the half of a shallow hexagon. A porch,

with seats in it, surmounted by a pinnacle, pointed roofs, and clustered chimneys, complete the picture. Alas! it is little else but a picture! The very walls are crumbling to decay under a careless landlord and a ruined tenant.

Now a few yards farther, and I reach the bank. Ah! I smell them already—their exquisite perfume steams and lingers in this moist heavy air. Through this little gate, and along the green south bank of this green wheat-field, and they burst upon me, the lovely violets, in tenfold loveliness! The ground is covered with them, white and purple, enamelling the short dewy grass, looking but the more vividly coloured under the dull, leaden sky. There they lie by hundreds, by thousands. In former years I have been used to watch them from the tiny green bud, till one or two stole into bloom. They never came on me before in such a sudden and luxuriant glory of simple beauty,—and I do really owe one pure and genuine pleasure to feverish London! How beautifully they are placed too, on this sloping bank, with the palm branches waving over them, full of early bees, and mixing their honeyed scent with the more delicate violet odour! How transparent and smooth and lusty are the branches, full of sap and life! And there, just by the old mossy root, is a superb tuft of primroses, with a yellow butterfly floating over them,

and looking like a flower lifted up by the air. What happiness to sit on this turfy knoll, and fill my basket with the blossoms! What a renewal of heart and mind! To sit in such a scene of peace and sweetness is again to be fearless and gay and gentle as a child. Then it is that thought becomes poetry, and feeling religion. Then it is that we are happy and good. Oh that my whole life could pass so, floating on blissful and innocent sensation, enjoying in peace and gratitude the common blessings of nature, thankful above all for the simple habits, the healthful temperament, which render them so dear! Alas! who may dare expect a life of such happiness? But I can at least snatch and prolong the fleeting pleasure, can fill my basket with pure flowers, and my heart with pure thoughts; can gladden my little home with their sweetness; can divide my treasures with one, a dear one, who cannot seek them; can see them when I shut my eyes; and dream of them when I fall asleep.

THE TALKING LADY.

BEN JONSON has a play called *The Silent Woman*, who turns out, as might be expected, to be no woman at all—nothing, as Master Slender said, but “a great lubberly boy;” thereby, as I apprehend, discourteously presuming that a silent woman is a non-entity. If the learned dramatist, thus happily prepared and predisposed, had happened to fall in with such a specimen of female loquacity as I have just parted with, he might perhaps have given us a pendant to his picture in the *Talking Lady*. Pity but he had! He would have done her justice, which I could not at any time, least of all now: I am too much stunned; too much like one escaped from a belfry on a coronation day. I am just resting from the fatigue of four days’ hard listening;—four snowy, sleety, rainy days—days of every variety of falling weather, all of them too bad to admit the possibility that any petticoated thing, were she as hardy as a Scotch fir, should stir out,—four days chained by “sad civility” to that fire-side,

once so quiet, and again—cheering thought!—again I trust to be so, when the echo of that visitor's incessant tongue shall have died away.

The visitor in question is a very excellent and respectable elderly lady, upright in mind and body, with a figure that does honour to her dancing-master, a face exceedingly well preserved, wrinkled and freckled, but still fair, and an air of gentility over her whole person, which is not in the least affected by her out-of-fashion garb. She could never be taken for any thing but a woman of family, and perhaps she could as little pass for any other than an old maid. She took us in her way from London to the west of England; and being, as she wrote, "not quite well, not equal to much company, prayed that no other guest might be admitted, so that she might have the pleasure of our conversation all to herself,"—(*Ours!* as if it were possible for any of us to slide in a word edgewise!)—"and especially enjoy the gratification of talking over old times with the master of the house, her countryman." Such was the promise of her letter, and to the letter it has been kept. All the news and scandal of a large county forty years ago, and a hundred years before, and ever since, all the marriages, deaths, births, elopements, lawsuits, and casualties of her own times, her father's, grandfather's, great-grandfather's, nephew's, and grand-nephew's, has she detailed with a minute-

ness, an accuracy, a prodigality of learning, a profuseness of proper names, a pedantry of locality, which would excite the envy of a county historian, a king at arms, or even a Scotch novelist. Her knowledge is astonishing; but the most astonishing part of all is how she came by that knowledge. It should seem, to listen to her, as if, at some time of her life, she must have listened herself; and yet her countryman declares, that in the forty years he has known her, no such event has occurred; and she knows new news too! It must be intuition.

The manner of her speech has little remarkable. It is rather old-fashioned and provincial, but perfectly lady-like, low and gentle, and not seeming so fast as it is; like the great pedestrians she clears her ground easily, and never seems to use any exertion; yet "I would my horse had the speed of her tongue, and so good a continuer." She will talk you sixteen hours a day for twenty days together, and not deduct one poor five minutes for halts and baiting time. Talking, sheer talking, is meat and drink and sleep to her. She likes nothing else. Eating is a sad interruption. For the tea-table she has some toleration; but dinner, with its clatter of plates and jingle of knives and forks, dinner is her abhorrence. Nor are the other common pursuits of life more in her favour. Walking exhausts the breath that might be better employed.

Dancing is a noisy diversion, and singing is worse ; she cannot endure any music, except the long, grand, dull concerto, which nobody thinks of listening to. Reading and chess she classes together as silent barbarisms, unworthy of a social and civilised people. Cards, too, have their faults ; there is a rivalry, a mute eloquence in those four aces, that leads away the attention ; besides, partners will sometimes scold ; so she never plays at cards ; and upon the strength of this abstinence had very nearly passed for *serious*, till it was discovered that she could not abide a long sermon. She always looks out for the shortest preacher, and never went to above one Bible Meeting in her life.—“ Such speeches !” quoth she : “ I thought the men never meant to have done. People have great need of patience.” Plays, of course, she abhors, and operas, and mobs, and all things that will be heard, especially children ; though for babies, particularly when asleep, for dogs and pictures, and such silent intelligences as serve to talk of and talk to, she has a considerable partiality ; and an agreeable and gracious flattery to the mamas and other owners of these pretty dumb things is a very usual introduction to her miscellaneous harangues. The matter of these orations is inconceivably various. Perhaps the local and genealogical anecdotes, the sort of supplement to the history of *****shire, may be her strongest point ;

but she shines almost as much in medicine and housewifery. Her medical dissertations savour a little of that particular branch of the science called quackery. She has a specific against almost every disease to which the human frame is liable ; and is terribly prosy and unmerciful in her symptoms. Her cures kill. In housekeeping, her notions resemble those of other verbal managers ; full of economy and retrenchment, with a leaning towards reform, though she loves so well to declaim on the abuses in the cook's department, that I am not sure that she would very heartily thank any radical who should sweep them quite away. For the rest, her system sounds very finely in theory, but rather fails in practice. Her recipes would be capital, only that some way or other they do not eat well ; her preserves seldom keep ; and her sweet wines are sure to turn sour. These are certainly her favourite topics ; but any one will do. Allude to some anecdote of the neighbourhood, and she forthwith treats you with as many parallel passages as are to be found in an air with variations. Take up a new publication, and she is equally at home there ; for though she knows little of books, she has, in the course of an up-and-down life, met with a good many authors, and teazes and provokes you by telling of them precisely what you do not care to hear, the maiden names of their wives, and the christian names of their daugh-

ters, and into what families their sisters and cousins married, and in what towns they have lived, what streets, and what numbers. Boswell himself never drew up the table of Dr. Johnson's Fleet-street courts with greater care, than she made out to me the successive residences of P. P. Esq., author of a tract on the French Revolution, and a pamphlet on the Poor Laws. The very weather is not a safe subject. Her memory is a perpetual register of hard frosts, and long droughts and high winds, and terrible storms, with all the evils that followed in their train, and all the personal events connected with them; so that if you happen to remark that clouds are come up, and you fear it may rain, she replies, "Aye, it is just such a morning as three-and-thirty years ago, when my poor cousin was married—you remember my cousin Barbara—she married so and so, the son of so and so;" and then comes the whole pedigree of the bridegroom; the amount of the settlements, and the reading and signing them over night; a description of the wedding-dresses, in the style of Sir Charles Grandison, and how much the bride's gown cost per yard; the names, residences, and a short subsequent history of the bridemaids and men, the gentleman who gave the bride away, and the clergyman who performed the ceremony, with a learned antiquarian digression relative to the church; then the setting out in procession;

the marriage; the kissing; the crying; the breakfasting; the drawing the cake through the ring; and, finally, the bridal excursion, which brings us back again at an hour's end to the starting-post, the weather, and the whole story of the sopping, the drying, the clothes-spoiling, the cold-catching, and all the small evils of a summer shower. By this time it rains, and she sits down to a pathetic see-saw of conjectures on the chance of Mrs. Smith's having set out for her daily walk, or the possibility that Dr. Brown may have ventured to visit his patients in his gig, and the certainty that Lady Green's new housemaid would come from London on the outside of the coach.

With all this intolerable prosing, she is actually reckoned a pleasant woman! Her acquaintance in the great manufacturing town where she usually resides is very large, which may partly account for the misnomer. Her conversation is of a sort to bear dividing. Besides, there is, in all large societies, an instinctive sympathy which directs each individual to the companion most congenial to his humour. Doubtless, her associates deserve the old French compliment, "*Ils ont tous un grand talent pour le silence.*" Parcelled out amongst some seventy or eighty, there may even be some savour in her talk. It is the *tête-à-tête* that kills, or the small fire-side circle of three or four, where only one can speak, and all the rest must seem to listen—*seem!* did

I say?—must listen in good earnest. Hotspur's expedient in a similar situation of crying "Hem! Go to," and marking not a word, will not do here; compared to her, Owen Glendower was no conjuror. She has the eye of a hawk, and detects a wandering glance, an incipient yawn, the slightest movement of impatience. The very needle must be quiet. If a pair of scissors do but wag, she is affronted, draws herself up, breaks off in the middle of a story, of a sentence, of a word, and the unlucky culprit must, for civility's sake, summon a more than Spartan fortitude, and beg the torturer to resume her torments—"That, that is the unkindest cut of all!" I wonder, if she had happened to have married, how many husbands she would have talked to death. It is certain that none of her relations are long-lived after she comes to reside with them. Father, mother, uncle, sister, brother, two nephews, and one niece, all these have successively passed away, though a healthy race, and with no visible disorder—except—but we must not be uncharitable. They might have died, though she had been born dumb:—"It is an accident that happens every day." Since the decease of her last nephew, she attempted to form an establishment with a widow lady, for the sake, as they both said, of the comfort of society. But—strange miscalculation!—she was a talker too! They parted in a week.

And we also have parted. I am just returned from escorting her to the coach, which is to convey her two hundred miles westward; and I have still the murmur of her *adieux* resounding in my ears, like the indistinct hum of the air on a frosty night. It was curious to see how, almost simultaneously, her mournful *adieux* shaded into cheerful salutations of her new comrades, the passengers in the mail. Poor souls! Little does the civil young lad who made way for her, or the fat lady, his mama, who with pains and inconvenience made room for her, or the grumpy gentleman in the opposite corner, who, after some dispute, was at length won to admit her dressing-box,—little do they suspect what is to befall them. Two hundred miles! and she never sleeps in a carriage! Well, patience be with them, and comfort and peace! A pleasant journey to them! And to her all happiness! She is a most kind and excellent person, one for whom I would do any thing in my poor power—ay, even were it to listen to her another four days.

E L L E N.

A VERY small gift may sometimes cause great pleasure. I have just received a present which has delighted me more than any thing ever bestowed on me by friends or fortune. It is——But my readers shall guess what it is; and, that they may be enabled to do so, I must tell them a story.

Charlotte and Ellen Page were the twin daughters of the rector of N., a small town in Dorsetshire. They were his only children, having lost their mother shortly after their birth; and, as their father was highly connected, and still more highly accomplished, and possessed good church preferment with a considerable private fortune, they were reared and educated in the most liberal and expensive style. Whilst mere infants, they had been uncommonly beautiful, and as remarkably alike as occasionally happens with twin sisters, distinguished only by some ornament of dress. Their very nurse, as she used to boast, could hardly tell her pretty “couplets” apart, so exactly alike were the

soft blue eyes, the rosy cheeks, the cherry lips, and the curly light hair. Change the turquoise necklace for the coral, and nurse herself would not know Charlotte from Ellen. This pretty puzzle, this inconvenience, of which mamas and aunts and grandmamas love to complain, did not last long. Either from a concealed fall, or from original delicacy of habit, the little Ellen faded and drooped almost into deformity. There was no visible defect in her shape, except a slight and almost imperceptible lameness when in quick motion; but there was the marked and peculiar look in the features, the languor and debility, and above all the distressing consciousness attendant upon imperfect formation; and, at the age of twenty years, the contrast between the sisters was even more striking than the likeness had been at two.

Charlotte was a fine, robust, noble-looking girl, rather above the middle height; her eyes and complexion sparkled and glowed with life and health, her rosy lips seemed to be made for smiles, and her glossy brown hair played in natural ringlets round her dimpled face. Her manner was a happy mixture of the playful and the gentle; frank, innocent, and fearless, she relied with a sweet confidence on every body's kindness, was ready to be pleased, and secure of pleasing. Her artlessness and *naïveté* had great success in society, especially as they were united with the most perfect good-breeding,

and considerable quickness and talent. Her musical powers were of the most delightful kind; she sang exquisitely, joining, to great taste and science, a life, and freedom, and buoyancy, quite unusual in that artificial personage, a young lady. Her clear and ringing notes had the effect of a milk-maid's song, as if a mere ebullition of animal spirits; there was no resisting the contagion of Charlotte's glee. She was a general favourite, and above all a favourite at home,—the apple of her father's eye, the pride and ornament of his house, and the delight and comfort of his life. The two children had been so much alike, and born so nearly together, that the precedence in age had never been definitively settled; but that point seemed very early to decide itself. Unintentionally, as it were, Charlotte took the lead, gave invitations, received visitors, sate at the head of the table, became in fact and in name Miss Page, while her sister continued Miss Ellen.

Poor Ellen! she was short, and thin, and sickly, and pale, with no personal charm but the tender expression of her blue eyes and the timid sweetness of her countenance. The resemblance to her sister had vanished altogether, except when very rarely some strong emotion of pleasure, a word of praise, or a look of kindness from her father, would bring a smile and a blush at once into her face, and lighten it up like a sunbeam. Then, for a passing moment, she was like Charlotte,

and even prettier,—there was so much of mind, of soul, in the transitory beauty. In manner she was unchangeably gentle and distressingly shy, shy even to awkwardness. Shame and fear clung to her like her shadow. In company she could neither sing, nor play, nor speak, without trembling, especially when her father was present. Her awe of him was inexpressible. Mr. Page was a man of considerable talent and acquirement, of polished and elegant manners, and great conversational power,—quick, ready, and sarcastic. He never condescended to scold; but there was something very formidable in the keen glance, and the cutting jest, to which poor Ellen's want of presence of mind frequently exposed her,—something from which she shrank into the very earth. He was a good man too, and a kind father—at least he meant to be so,—attentive to her health and comfort, strictly impartial in favours and presents, in pocket-money and amusements, making no difference between the twins, except that which he could not help, the difference in his love. But, to an apprehensive temper and an affectionate heart, that was every thing; and, whilst Charlotte flourished and blossomed like a rose in the sunshine, Ellen sickened and withered like the same plant in the shade.

Mr. Page lost much enjoyment by this unfortunate partiality; for he had taste enough to have particularly

valued the high endowments which formed the delight of the few friends to whom his daughter was intimately known. To them not only her varied and accurate acquirements, but her singular richness of mind, her grace and propriety of expression and fertility of idea, joined to the most perfect ignorance of her own superiority, rendered her an object of as much admiration as interest. In poetry, especially, her justness of taste and quickness of feeling were almost unrivalled. She was no poetess herself, never, I believe, even ventured to compose a sonnet; and her enjoyment of high literature was certainly the keener for that wise abstinence from a vain competition. Her admiration was really worth having. The tears would come into her eyes, the book would fall from her hand, and she would sit lost in ecstasy over some noble passage, till praise, worthy of the theme, would burst in unconscious eloquence from her lips.

But the real charm of Ellen Page lay in the softness of her heart and the generosity of her character: no human being was ever so free from selfishness, in all its varied and clinging forms. She literally forgot herself in her pure and ardent sympathy with all whom she loved, or all to whom she could be useful. There were no limits to her indulgence, no bounds to her candour. Shy and timid as she was, she forgot her fears to plead for the innocent, or the penitent, or even the guilty.

She was the excuser-general of the neighbourhood, turned every speech and action the sunny side without, and often in her good-natured acuteness hit on the real principle of action, when the cunning and the worldly-wise and the cynical, and such as look only for bad motives, had failed. She had, too, that rare quality, a genuine sympathy not only with the sorrowful, (there is a pride in that feeling, a superiority,—we have all plenty of that,) but with the happy. She could smile with those who smiled as well as weep with those who wept, and rejoice in a success to which she had not contributed, protected from every touch of envy, no less by her noble spirit than by her pure humility: she never thought of herself.

So constituted, it may be imagined that she was, to all who really knew her, an object of intense admiration and love. Servants, children, poor people, all adored Miss Ellen. She had other friends in her own rank of life, who had found her out—many; but her chief friend, her principal admirer, she who loved her with the most entire affection, and looked up to her with the most devoted respect, was her sister. Never was the strong and lovely tie of twin-sisterhood more closely knit than in these two charming young women. Ellen looked on her favoured sister with a pure and unjealous delight that made its own happiness, a spirit of candour and of justice that never permitted her to cast a shade

of blame on the sweet object of her father's partiality : she never indeed blamed him, it seemed to her so natural that every one should prefer her sister. Charlotte, on the other hand, used all her influence for Ellen, protected and defended her, and was half-tempted to murmur at an affection which she would have valued more, if shared equally with that dear friend. Thus they lived in peace and harmony, Charlotte's bolder temper and higher spirits leading and guiding in all common points, whilst on the more important she implicitly yielded to Ellen's judgment. But, when they had reached their twenty-first year, a great evil threatened one of the sisters, arising (strange to say) from the other's happiness. Charlotte, the reigning *belle* of an extensive and affluent neighbourhood, had had almost as many suitors as Penelope ; but, light-hearted, happy at home, constantly busy and gay, she had taken no thought of love, and always struck me as a very likely subject for an old maid : yet her time came at last. A young man, the very reverse of herself, pale, thoughtful, gentlemanlike, and melancholy, wooed and won our fair Euphrosyne. He was the second son of a noble house, and bred to the church ; and it was agreed between the fathers, that, as soon as he should be ordained, (for he still wanted some months of the necessary age,) and settled in a family living held for him by a friend, the young couple should be married.

In the mean while Mr. Page, who had recently succeeded to some property in Ireland, found it necessary to go thither for a short time; and, unwilling to take his daughters with him, as his estate lay in the disturbed districts, he indulged us with their company during his absence. They came to us in the bursting spring-time, on the very same day with the nightingale; the country was new to them, and they were delighted with the scenery and with our cottage life. We, on our part, were enchanted with our young guests. Charlotte was certainly the most amiable of enamoured damsels, for love with her was but a more sparkling and smiling form of happiness;—all that there was of care and fear in this attachment fell to Ellen's lot; but even she, though sighing at the thought of parting, could not be very miserable whilst her sister was so happy.

A few days after their arrival, we happened to dine with our accomplished neighbours, Colonel Falkner and his sister. Our young friends of course accompanied us; and a similarity of age, of liveliness, and of musical talent, speedily recommended Charlotte and Miss Falkner to each other. They became immediately intimate, and were soon almost inseparable. Ellen at first hung back. "The house was too gay, too full of shifting company, of titles, and of strange faces. Miss Falkner was very kind; but she took too much notice of her, introduced her to lords and ladies, talked of her

drawings, and pressed her to sing :—she would rather, if I pleased, stay with me, and walk in the coppice, or sit in the arbour, and one might read Spenser whilst the other worked—that would be best of all. Might she stay ?”—“ Oh surely ! But Colonel Falkner, Ellen, I thought you would have liked him ?”—“ Yes !”—“ That *yes* sounds exceedingly like *no*.”—“ Why, is he not almost too clever, too elegant, too grand a man ? Too mannered, as it were ? Too much like what one fancies of a prince—of George the Fourth, for instance—too high and too condescending ? These are strange faults,” continued she, laughing—“ and it is a curious injustice that I should dislike a man merely because he is so graceful, that he makes me feel doubly awkward—so tall, that I am in his presence a conscious dwarf—so alive and eloquent in conversation, that I feel more than ever puzzled and unready. But so it is. To say the truth, I am more afraid of him than of any human being in the world, except one. I may stay with you—may I not ; and read of Una and of Britomart—that prettiest scene where her old nurse soothes her to sleep ? I may stay ?” And for two or three mornings she did stay with me ; but Charlotte’s influence and Miss Falkner’s kindness speedily drew her to Hollygrove, at first shily and reluctantly, yet soon with an evident though quiet enjoyment ; and we, sure that our young visitors could gain nothing but good in such so-

ciety, were pleased that they should so vary the humble home-scene.

Colonel Falkner was a man in the very prime of life, of that happy age which unites the grace and spirit of youth with the firmness and vigour of manhood. The heir of a large fortune, he had served in the peninsular war, fought in Spain and France and at Waterloo, and, quitting the army at the peace, had loitered about Germany and Italy and Greece, and only returned on the death of his father, two or three years back, to reside on the family estate, where he had won "golden opinions from all sorts of people." He was, as Ellen truly described him, tall and graceful, and well-bred almost to a fault; reminding her of that *beau-ideal* of courtly elegance George the Fourth, and me, (pray, reader, do not tell!) me, a little, a very little, the least in the world, of Sir Charles Grandison. He certainly did excel rather too much in the mere forms of politeness, in cloakings and bowings, and handings down stairs; but then he was, like both his prototypes, thoroughly imbued with its finer essence—considerate, attentive, kind, in the most comprehensive sense of that comprehensive word. I have certainly known men of deeper learning and more original genius, but never any one whose powers were better adapted to conversation, who could blend more happily the most varied and extensive knowledge with the most playful wit and

the most interesting and amiable character. *Fascinating* was the word that seemed made for him. His conversation was entirely free from trickery and display—the charm was (or seemed to be) perfectly natural: he was an excellent listener; and when he was speaking to any eminent person—orator, artist, or poet,—I have sometimes seen a slight hesitation, a momentary diffidence; as attractive as it was unexpected. It was this astonishing evidence of fellow-feeling, joined to the gentleness of his tone, the sweetness of his smile, and his studied avoidance of all particular notice or attention, that first reconciled Ellen to Colonel Falkner. His sister too, a charming young woman, as like him as Viola to Sebastian, began to understand the sensitive properties of this shrinking and delicate flower, which, left to itself, repaid their kind neglect by unfolding in a manner that surprised and delighted us all. Before the spring had glided into summer, Ellen was as much at home at Holly-grove as with us; talked and laughed and played and sang as freely as Charlotte. She would indeed break off if visibly listened to, either when speaking or singing; but still the ice was broken; that rich, low, mellow voice, unrivalled in pathos and sweetness, might be heard every evening, even by the Colonel, with little more precaution, not to disturb her by praise or notice, than would be used with her fellow-warbler the nightingale.

She was happy at Holly-grove, and we were delighted ; but so shifting and various are human feelings and wishes, that, as the summer wore on, before the hay-making was over in its beautiful park, whilst the bees were still in its lime-trees, and the golden beetle lurked in its white rose, I began to lament that she had ever seen Holly-grove or known its master. It was clear to me, that unintentionally on his part, unwittingly on hers, her heart was gone,—and, considering the merit of the unconscious possessor, probably gone for ever. She had all the pretty marks of love at that happy moment when the name and nature of the passion are alike unsuspected by the victim. To her there was but one object in the whole world, and that one was Colonel Falkner : she lived only in his presence ; hung on his words ; was restless she knew not why in his absence ; adopted his tastes and opinions, which differed from hers as those of clever men so frequently do from those of clever women ; read the books he praised, and praised them too, deserting our old idols, Spenser and Fletcher, for his favourites, Dryden and Pope ; sang the songs he loved as she walked about the house ; drew his features instead of Milton's in a portrait which she was copying for me of our great poet,—and finally wrote his name on the margin. She moved as in a dream—a dream as innocent as it was delicious!—but oh the sad, sad waking ! It made my heart ache to

think of the misery to which that fine and sensitive mind seemed to be reserved. Ellen was formed for constancy and suffering—it was her first love, and it would be her last. I had no hope that her affection was returned. Young men, talk as they may of mental attractions, are commonly the slaves of personal charms. Colonel Falkner, especially, was a professed admirer of beauty. I had even sometimes fancied that he was caught by Charlotte's, and had therefore taken an opportunity to communicate her engagement to his sister. Certainly he paid our fair and blooming guest extraordinary attention: any thing of gallantry or compliment was always addressed to her, and so for the most part was his gay and captivating conversation; whilst his manner to Ellen, though exquisitely soft and kind, seemed rather that of an affectionate brother. I had no hopes.

Affairs were in this posture when I was at once grieved and relieved by the unexpected recall of our young visitors. Their father had completed his business in Ireland, and was eager to return to his dear home, and his dear children; Charlotte's lover, too, was ordained, and was impatient to possess his promised treasure. The intended bridegroom was to arrive the same evening to escort the fair sisters, and the journey was to take place the next day. Imagine the revulsion of feeling produced by a short note, a

bit of folded paper—the natural and redoubled ecstasy of Charlotte, the mingled emotions of Ellen. She wept bitterly : at first she called it joy—joy that she should again see her dear father ; then it was grief to lose her Charlotte ; grief to part from me ; but, when she threw herself in a farewell embrace on the neck of Miss Falkner, whose brother happened to be absent for a few days on business, the truth appeared to burst upon her at once, in a gush of agony that seemed likely to break her heart. Miss Falkner was deeply affected ; begged her to write to her often, very often ; loaded her with the gifts of little price, the valueless tokens which affection holds so dear, and stole one of her fair ringlets in return. “ This is the curl which William used to admire,” said she : “ have you no message for poor William ?”—Poor Ellen ! her blushes spoke, and the tears which dropped from her downcast eyes ; but she had no utterance. Charlotte, however, came to her relief with a profusion of thanks and compliments ; and Ellen, weeping with a violence that would not be controlled, at last left Holly-grove.

The next day we too lost our dear young friends. Oh what a sad day it was ! how much we missed Charlotte’s bright smile and Ellen’s sweet complacency ! We walked about desolate and forlorn, with the painful sense of want and insufficiency, and of that vacancy in our home, and at our board, which the departure of a

cherished guest is sure to occasion. To lament the absence of Charlotte, the dear Charlotte, the happiest of the happy, was pure selfishness ; but of the aching heart of Ellen, my dearer Ellen, I could not bear to think—and yet I could think of nothing else, could call up no other image than her pale and trembling form, weeping and sobbing as I had seen her at Hollygrove ; she haunted even my dreams.

Early the ensuing morning I was called down to the colonel, and found him in the garden. He apologised for his unseasonable intrusion ; talked of the weather, then of the loss which our society had sustained ; blushed and hesitated ; had again recourse to the weather ; and at last by a mighty effort, after two or three sentences begun and unfinished, contrived, with an embarrassment more graceful and becoming than all his polished readiness, to ask me to furnish him with a letter to Mr. Page. “ You must have seen,” said he, colouring and smiling, “ that I was captivated by your beautiful friend ; and I hope—I could have wished to have spoken first to herself, to have made an interest—but still if her affections are disengaged—tell me, you who must know, you who are always my friend, have I any chance ? Is she disengaged ?”—“ Alas ! I have sometimes feared this ; but I thought you had heard—your sister at least was aware ”——“ Of what ? It was but this very morn-

ing—aware of what?”—“Of Charlotte’s engagement.”—“Charlotte! It is of Ellen, not her sister, that I speak and think! Of Ellen, the pure, the delicate, the divine! That whitest and sweetest of flowers; the jasmine, the myrtle, the tuberose among women,” continued he, elucidating his similes by gathering a sprig of each plant, as he paced quickly up and down the garden walk—“Ellen, the fairest and the best; your darling, and mine! Will you give me a letter to her father? And will you wish me success?”—“Will I! Oh! how sincerely! My dear colonel, I beg a thousand pardons for undervaluing your taste—for suspecting you of preferring a damask rose to a blossomed myrtle; I should have known you better.”—And then we talked of Ellen, dear Ellen, talked and praised till even the lover’s heart was satisfied. I am convinced that he went away that morning, persuaded that I was one of the cleverest women, and the best judges of character that ever lived.

And now my story is over. What need to say, that the letter was written with the warmest zeal, and received with the most cordial graciousness—or that Ellen, though shedding sweet tears, bore the shock of joy better than the shock of grief,—or that the twin sisters were married on the same day, at the same altar, each to the man of her heart, and each with every prospect of more than common felicity? What

need to say this? Or, having said this, why should I tell what was the gift that so enchanted me? I will not tell:—my readers shall decide according to their several fancies between silver favours, or bridal gloves, or the magical wedding-cake, drawn nine times through the ring.

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

THE COWSLIP-BALL.

MAY 16.—There are moments in life, when, without any visible or immediate cause, the spirits sink and fail, as it were, under the mere pressure of existence : moments of unaccountable depression, when one is weary of one's very thoughts, haunted by images that will not depart—images many and various, but all painful ; friends lost, or changed, or dead ; hopes disappointed even in their accomplishment ; fruitless regrets, powerless wishes, doubt and fear and self-distrust, and self-disapprobation. They who have known these feelings, (and who is there so happy as not to have known some of them ?) will understand why Alfieri became powerless, and Froissart dull ; and why even needle-work, that most effectual sedative, that grand soother and composer of woman's distress, fails to comfort me to-day. I will go out into the air this cool pleasant afternoon, and try what that will do. I

fancy that exercise, or exertion of any kind, is the true specific for nervousness. "Fling but a stone, the giant dies." I will go to the meadows, the beautiful meadows! and I will have my materials of happiness, Lizzy and May, and a basket for flowers, and we will make a cowslip-ball. "Did you ever see a cowslip-ball, my Lizzy?" — "No." — "Come away, then; make haste! run Lizzy!"

And on we go fast, fast! down the road, across the lea, past the workhouse, along the great pond, till we slide into the deep narrow lane, whose hedges seem to meet over the water, and win our way to the little farm-house at the end. "Through the farm-yard, Lizzy; over the gate: never mind the cows; they are quiet enough." — "I don't mind 'em," said Miss Lizzy, boldly and truly, and with a proud affronted air, displeased at being thought to mind any thing, and showing by her attitude and manner some design of proving her courage by an attack on the largest of the herd, in the shape of a pull by the tail. "I don't mind 'em." — "I know you don't, Lizzy; but let them alone, and don't chase the turkey-cock. Come to me, my dear!" and, for a wonder, Lizzy came.

In the mean time my other pet, May-flower, had also gotten into a scrape. She had driven about a huge unwieldy sow, till the animal's grunting had disturbed the repose of a still more enormous Newfound-

land dog, the guardian of the yard. Out he sallied growling from the depth of his kennel, erecting his tail, and shaking his long chain. May's attention was instantly diverted from the sow to this new playmate, friend or foe, she cared not which; and he of the kennel, seeing his charge unhurt and out of danger, was at leisure to observe the charms of his fair enemy, as she frolicked round him, always beyond the reach of his chain, yet always with the natural instinctive coquetry of her sex, alluring him to the pursuit which she knew to be vain. I never saw a prettier flirtation. At last the noble animal, wearied out, retired to the inmost recesses of his habitation, and would not even approach her when she stood right before the entrance. "You are properly served, May. Come along, Lizzy. Across this wheat-field, and now over the gate. Stop! let me lift you down. No jumping, no breaking of necks, Lizzy! And here we are in the meadows, and out of the world. Robinson Crusoe, in his lonely island, had scarcely a more complete, or a more beautiful solitude."

These meadows consist of a double row of small enclosures of rich grass-land, a mile or two in length, sloping down from high arable grounds on either side to a little nameless brook that winds between them, with a course which in its infinite variety, clearness, and rapidity, seems to emulate the bold rivers of the

north, of whom, far more than of our lazy southern streams, our rivulet presents a miniature likeness. Never was water more exquisitely tricky :—now darting over the bright pebbles, sparkling and flashing in the light with a bubbling music, as sweet and wild as the song of the woodlark ; now stretching quietly along, giving back the rich tufts of the golden marsh-marygolds which grow on its margin ; now sweeping round a fine reach of green grass, rising steeply into a high mound, a mimic promontory, whilst the other side sinks softly away, like some tiny bay, and the water flows between, so clear, so wide, so shallow, that Lizzy, longing for adventure, is sure she could cross unwetted ; now dashing through two sand-banks, a torrent deep and narrow, which May clears at a bound ; now sleeping half-hidden beneath the alders and hawthorns and wild roses, with which the banks are so profusely and variously fringed, whilst flags*, lilies, and other aquatic plants, almost cover

* Walking along these meadows one bright sunny afternoon, a year or two back, and rather later in the season, I had an opportunity of observing a curious circumstance in natural history. Standing close to the edge of the stream, I remarked a singular appearance on a large tuft of flags. It looked like bunches of flowers, the leaves of which seemed dark, yet transparent, intermingled with brilliant tubes of bright blue or shining green. On examining this phenomenon more closely, it turned out to be several clusters of dragon-flies, just emerged from their deformed chrysalis state, and

the surface of the stream. In good truth it is a beautiful brook, and one that Walton himself might have sitten by and loved, for trout are there ; we see them as they dart up the stream, and hear and start at the sudden plunge when they spring to the surface for the summer flies. Isaac Walton would have loved our brook and our quiet meadows ; they breathe the very spirit of his own peacefulness, a soothing quietude that sinks into the soul. There is no path through them, not one ; we might wander about a whole spring day, and not see a trace of human habitation. They belong to a number of small proprietors, who allow each other access through their respective grounds, from pure kindness and neighbourly feeling, a privilege never abused ; and the fields on the other side of the water are reached by a rough plank, or a tree thrown across, or some such homely bridge. We ourselves possess one of the most beautiful ; so that the strange pleasure of property, that instinct which makes Lizzy delight in her broken doll, and May in the bare bone which she has pilfered from the kennel of her recreant

still torpid and motionless from the wetness of their filmy wings. Half an hour later we returned to the spot, and they were gone. We had seen them at the very moment when beauty was complete, and animation dormant. I have since found a nearly similar account of this curious process in Mr. Bingley's very entertaining work, called "Animal Biography."

admirer of Newfoundland, is added to the other charms of this enchanting scenery ; a strange pleasure it is, when one so poor as I can feel it ! Perhaps it is felt most by the poor, with the rich it may be less intense—too much diffused and spread out, becoming thin by expansion, like leaf-gold ; the little of the poor may be not only more precious, but more pleasant to them : certainly that bit of grassy and blossomy earth, with its green knolls and tufted bushes, its old pollards wreathed with ivy, and its bright and babbling waters, is very dear to me. But I must always have loved these meadows, so fresh, and cool, and delicious to the eye and to the tread, full of cowslips, and of all vernal flowers : Shakspeare's Song of Spring bursts irrepressibly from our lips as we step on them :

“ When daisies pied, and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then on every tree—”

“ Cuckoo ! cuckoo !” cried Lizzy, breaking in with her clear childish voice ; and immediately, as if at her call, the real bird, from a neighbouring tree (for these meadows are dotted with timber like a park), began to echo my lovely little girl, “ cuckoo ! cuckoo !” I have a prejudice very unpastoral and unpoetical (but I

cannot help it, I have many such), against this “har-binger of spring.” His note is so monotonous, so melancholy; and then the boys mimic him; one hears “cuckoo! cuckoo!” in dirty streets, amongst smoky houses, and the bird is hated for faults not his own. But prejudices of taste, likings and dislikings, are not always vanquishable by reason; so, to escape the serenade from the tree, which promised to be of considerable duration, (when once that eternal song begins, on it goes ticking like a clock)—to escape that noise I determined to excite another, and challenged Lizzy to a cowslip-gathering; a trial of skill and speed, to see which should soonest fill her basket. My stratagem succeeded completely. What scrambling, what shouting, what glee from Lizzy! twenty cuckoos might have sung unheard whilst she was pulling her own flowers, and stealing mine, and laughing, screaming, and talking through all.

At last the baskets were filled, and Lizzy declared victor: and down we sate, on the brink of the stream, under a spreading hawthorn, just disclosing its own pearly buds, and surrounded with the rich and enamelled flowers of the wild hyacinth, blue and white, to make our cowslip-ball. Every one knows the process; to nip off the tuft of flowerets just below the top of the stalk, and hang each cluster nicely balanced across a riband, till you have a long string like a gar-

land ; then to press them closely together, and tie them tightly up. We went on very prosperously, *considering* ; as people say of a young lady's drawing, or a Frenchman's English, or a woman's tragedy, or of the poor little dwarf who works without fingers, or the ingenious sailor who writes with his toes, or generally of any performance which is accomplished by means seemingly inadequate to its production. To be sure we met with a few accidents. First, Lizzy spoiled nearly all her cowslips by snapping them off too short ; so there was a fresh gathering ; in the next place May overset my full basket, and sent the blossoms floating, like so many fairy favours, down the brook ; then when we were going on pretty steadily, just as we had made a superb wreath, and were thinking of tying it together, Lizzy, who held the riband, caught a glimpse of a gorgeous butterfly, all brown and red and purple, and skipping off to pursue the new object, let go her hold ; so all our treasures were abroad again. At last, however, by dint of taking a branch of alder as a substitute for Lizzy, and hanging the basket in a pollard-ash, out of sight of May, the cowslip-ball was finished. What a concentration of fragrance and beauty it was ! golden and sweet to satiety ! rich to sight, and touch, and smell ! Lizzy was enchanted, and ran off with her prize, hiding amongst the trees in the very coyness of ecstasy, as if

any human eye, even mine, would be a restraint on her innocent raptures.

In the mean while I sate listening, not to my enemy the cuckoo, but to a whole concert of nightingales, scarcely interrupted by any meaner bird, answering and vying with each other in those short delicious strains which are to the ear as roses to the eye; those snatches of lovely sound which come across us as airs from heaven. Pleasant thoughts, delightful associations, awoke as I listened; and almost unconsciously I repeated to myself the beautiful story of the Lutist and the Nightingale, from Ford's *Lover's Melancholy*. Here it is. Is there in English poetry any thing finer?

“ Passing from Italy to Greece, the tales
Which poets of an elder time have feign'd
To glorify their Tempe, bred in me
Desire of visiting Paradise.
To Thessaly I came, and living private,
Without acquaintance of more sweet companions
Than the old inmates to my love, my thoughts,
I day by day frequented silent groves
And solitary walks. One morning early
This accident encounter'd me : I heard
The sweetest and most ravishing contention
That art and nature ever were at strife in.
A sound of music touch'd mine ears, or rather
Indeed entranced my soul : as I stole nearer,
Invited by the melody, I saw
This youth, this fair-faced youth, upon his lute

With strains of strange variety and harmony
 Proclaiming, as it seem'd, so bold a challenge
 To the clear choristers of the woods, the birds,
 That as they flock'd about him, all stood silent,
 Wond'ring at what they heard. I wonder'd too,
 A nightingale,
 Nature's best-skill'd musician, undertakes
 The challenge ; and for every several strain
 The well-shaped youth could touch, she sang him down.
 He could not run divisions with more art
 Upon his quaking instrument than she,
 The nightingale, did with her various notes
 Reply to.
 Some time thus spent, the young man grew at last
 Into a pretty anger, that a bird,
 Whom art had never taught cliffs, moods, or notes,
 Should vie with him for mastery, whose study
 Had busied many hours to perfect practice.
 To end the controversy, in a rapture
 Upon his instrument he plays so swiftly,
 So many voluntaries, and so quick,
 That there was curiosity and cunning,
 Concord in discord, lines of differing method
 Meeting in one full centre of delight.
 The bird (ordain'd to be
 Music's first martyr) strove to imitate
 These several sounds ; which when her warbling throat
 Failed in, for grief down dropt she on his lute,
 And brake her heart. It was the quaintest sadness
 To see the conqueror upon her hearse
 To weep a funeral elegy of tears.
 He look'd upon the trophies of his art,
 Then sigh'd, then wip'd his eyes ; then sigh'd, and cry'd,

‘ Alas ! poor creature, I will soon revenge
This cruelty upon the author of it.
Henceforth this lute, guilty of innocent blood,
Shall never more betray a harmless peace
To an untimely end :’ and in that sorrow,
As he was pashing it against a tree,
I suddenly stept in.”

When I had finished the recitation of this exquisite passage, the sky, which had been all the afternoon dull and heavy, began to look more and more threatening ; darker clouds, like wreaths of black smoke, flew across the dead leaden tint ; a cooler, damper air blew over the meadows, and a few large heavy drops plashed in the water. “ We shall have a storm. Lizzy ! May ! where are ye ? Quick, quick, my Lizzy ! run, run ! faster, faster !”

And off we ran ; Lizzy not at all displeased at the thoughts of a wetting, to which indeed she is almost as familiar as a duck ; May, on the other hand, peering up at the weather, and shaking her pretty ears with manifest dismay. Of all animals, next to a cat, a greyhound dreads rain. She might have escaped it ; her light feet would have borne her home long before the shower ; but May is too faithful for that, too true a comrade, understands too well the laws of good fellowship ; so she waited for us. She did, to be sure, gallop on before, and then stop and look back, and beckon,

as it were, with some scorn in her black eyes at the slowness of our progress. We in the mean while got on as fast as we could, encouraging and reproaching each other. "Faster, my Lizzy! Oh what a bad runner!"—"Faster, faster! Oh what a bad runner," echoed my saucebox. "You are so fat, Lizzy, you make no way!"—"Ah! who else is fat?" retorted the darling. Certainly her mother is right; I do spoil that child.

By this time we were thoroughly soaked, all three. It was a pelting shower, that drove through our thin summer clothing and poor May's short glossy coat in a moment. And then, when we were wet to the skin, the sun came out, actually the sun, as if to laugh at our plight; and then, more provoking still, when the sun was shining, and the shower over, came a maid and a boy to look after us, loaded with cloaks and umbrellas enough to fence us against a whole day's rain. Never mind! on we go, faster and faster; Lizzy obliged to be most ignobly carried, having had the misfortune to lose a shoe in the mud, which we left the boy to look after.

Here we are at home—dripping; but glowing and laughing, and bearing our calamity most manfully. May, a dog of excellent sense, went instantly to bed in the stable, and is at this moment over head and ears in straw; Lizzy is gone to bed too, coaxed into that wise measure by a promise of tea and toast, and of not

going home till to-morrow, and the story of Little Red Riding-Hood; and I am enjoying the luxury of dry clothing by a good fire. Really getting wet through now and then is no bad thing, finery apart; for one should not like spoiling a new pelisse or a handsome plume; but when there is nothing in question but a white gown and a straw bonnet, as was the case to-day, it is rather pleasant than not. The little chill refreshes, and our enjoyment of the subsequent warmth and dryness is positive and absolute. Besides, the stimulus and exertion do good to the mind as well as body. How melancholy I was all the morning! how cheerful I am now! Nothing like a shower-bath—a real shower-bath, such as Lizzy and May and I have undergone, to cure low spirits. Try it, my dear readers, if ever ye be nervous—I will answer for its success.

A COUNTRY CRICKET-MATCH.

I DOUBT if there be any scene in the world more animating or delightful than a cricket-match;—I do not mean a set match at Lord's Ground for money, hard money, between a certain number of gentlemen and players, as they are called—people who make a trade of that noble sport, and degrade it into an affair of bettings, and hedgings, and cheatings, it may be, like boxing or horse-racing: nor do I mean a pretty fête in a gentleman's park, where one club of cricketing dandies encounters another such club, and where they show off in graceful costume to a gay marquee of admiring belles, who condescend so to purchase admiration, and while away a long summer morning in partaking cold collations, conversing occasionally, and seeming to understand the game;—the whole being conducted according to ball-room etiquette, so as to be exceedingly elegant and exceedingly dull. No! the cricket that I mean is a real solid old-fashioned match between neighbouring parishes, where each attacks the other for ho-

hour and a supper, glory, and half a crown a man. If there be any gentlemen amongst them, it is well—if not, it is so much the better. Your gentleman cricketer is in general rather an anomalous character. Elderly gentlemen are obviously good for nothing; and young beaux are, for the most part, hampered and trammelled by dress and habit; the stiff cravat, the pinched-in waist, the dandy walk—oh they will never do for cricket! Now, our country lads, accustomed to the flail or the hammer (your blacksmiths are capital hitters,) have the free use of their arms; they know how to move their shoulders; and they can move their feet too—they can run; then they are so much better made, so much more athletic, and yet so much lissomer—to use a Hampshire phrase, which deserves at least to be good English. Here and there, indeed, one meets with an old Etonian, who retains his boyish love for that game which formed so considerable a branch of his education; some even preserve their boyish proficiency, but in general it wears away like the Greek, quite as certainly, and almost as fast; a few years of Oxford, or Cambridge, or the continent, are sufficient to annihilate both the power and the inclination. No! a village match is the thing,—where our highest officer—our conductor (to borrow a musical term) is but a little farmer's second son; where a day-labourer is our bowler, and a blacksmith our long-stop; where the

spectators consist of the retired cricketers, the veterans of the green, the careful mothers, the girls, and all the boys of two parishes, together with a few amateurs little above them in rank, and not at all in pretension; where laughing and shouting, and the very ecstasy of merriment and good humour, prevail: such a match, in short, as I attended yesterday, at the expense of getting twice wet through, and as I would attend tomorrow, at the certainty of having that ducking doubled.

For the last three weeks our village has been in a state of great excitement, occasioned by a challenge from our north-western neighbours, the men of B., to contend with us at cricket. Now we have not been much in the habit of playing matches. Three or four years ago, indeed, we encountered the men of S., our neighbours south-by-east, with a sort of doubtful success, beating them on our own ground, whilst they in the second match returned the compliment on theirs. This discouraged us. Then an unnatural coalition between a high-church curate and an evangelical gentleman-farmer drove our lads from the Sunday evening practice, which, as it did not begin before both services were concluded, and as it tended to keep the young men from the ale-house, our magistrates had winked at, if not encouraged. The sport therefore had languished until the present season, when under another change of circumstances the spirit began to revive.

Half a dozen fine active lads, of influence amongst their comrades, grew into men and yearned for cricket: an enterprising publican gave a set of ribands; his rival, mine host of the Rose, an out-doer by profession, gave two; and the clergyman and his lay ally, both well-disposed and good-natured men, gratified by the submission to their authority, and finding, perhaps, that no great good resulted from the substitution of public houses for out-of-door diversions, relaxed. In short the practice recommenced, and the hill was again alive with men and boys, and innocent merriment; but farther than the riband matches amongst ourselves nobody dreamed of going, till this challenge—we were modest, and doubted our own strength. The B. people, on the other hand, must have been braggers born a whole parish of gasconaders. Never was such boasting! such crowing! such ostentatious display of practice! such mutual compliments from man to man—bowler to batter, batter to bowler! It was a wonder they did not challenge all England. It must be confessed that we were a little astounded; yet we firmly resolved not to decline the combat; and one of the most spirited of the new growth, William Grey by name, took up the glove in a style of manly courtesy, that would have done honour to a knight in the days of chivalry.—“We were not professed players,” he said; “being little better than school-boys, and scarcely

older : but, since they had done us the honour to challenge us, we would try our strength. It would be no discredit to be beaten by such a field."

Having accepted the wager of battle, our champion began forthwith to collect his forces. William Grey is himself one of the finest youths that one shall see,—tall, active, slender and yet strong, with a piercing eye full of sagacity, and a smile full of good humour,—a farmer's son by station, and used to hard work as farmers' sons are now, liked by every body, and admitted to be an excellent cricketer. He immediately set forth to muster his men, remembering with great complacency that Samuel Long, a bowler *comme il y en a peu*, the very man who had knocked down nine wickets, had beaten us, bowled us out at the fatal return match some years ago at S., had luckily, in a remove of a quarter of a mile last Lady-day, crossed the boundaries of his old parish, and actually belonged to us. Here was a stroke of good fortune! Our captain applied to him instantly; and he agreed at a word. Indeed Samuel Long is a very civilised person. He is a middle-aged man who looks rather old amongst our young lads, and whose thickness and breadth give no token of remarkable activity; but he is very active, and so steady a player! so safe! We had half gained the match when we had secured him. He is a man of substance, too, in every way; owns one cow, two don-

keys, six pigs, and geese and ducks beyond count; dresses like a farmer, and owes no man a shilling;— and all this from pure industry, sheer day-labour. Note, that your good cricketer is commonly the most industrious man in the parish; the habits that make him such are precisely those which make a good workman—steadiness, sobriety, and activity—Samuel Long might pass for the beau ideal of the two characters. Happy were we to possess him! Then we had another piece of good luck. James Brown, a journeyman blacksmith and a native, who, being of a rambling disposition, had roamed from place to place for half a dozen years, had just returned to settle with his brother at another corner of our village, bringing with him a prodigious reputation in cricket and in gallantry—the gay Lothario of the neighbourhood. He is said to have made more conquests in love and in cricket than any blacksmith in the county. To him also went the indefatigable William Grey, and he also consented to play. No end to our good fortune! Another celebrated batter, called Joseph Hearne, had likewise recently married into the parish. He worked, it is true, at the A. mills, but slept at the house of his wife's father in our territories. He also was sought and found by our leader. But he was grand and shy; made an immense favour of the thing; courted courting and then hung back;—"Did not know that he could be spared; had partly resolved

not to play again—at least not this season; thought it rash to accept the challenge; thought they might do without him——”——“ Truly I think so too,” said our spirited champion; “ we will not trouble you, Mr. Hearne.”

Having thus secured two powerful auxiliaries, and rejected a third, we began to reckon and select the regular native forces. Thus ran our list:—William Grey, 1.—Samuel Long, 2.—James Brown, 3.—George and John Simmons, one capital, the other so, so,—an uncertain hitter, but a good fieldsman, 5.—Joel Brent excellent, 6.—Ben Appleton—Here was a little pause—Ben’s abilities at cricket were not completely ascertained; but then he was so good a fellow, so full of fun and waggery! no doing without Ben. So he figured in the list, 7.—George Harris—a short halt there too! Slowish—slow but sure. I think the proverb brought him in, 8.—Tom Coper—oh, beyond the world, Tom Coper! the red-headed gardening lad, whose left-handed strokes send *her*, (a cricket-ball, like that other moving thing a ship, is always of the feminine gender,) send her spinning a mile, 9.—Robert Willis, another blacksmith, 10.

We had now ten of our eleven, but the choice of the last occasioned some demur. Three young Martins, rich farmers of the neighbourhood, successively presented themselves, and were all rejected by our inde-

pendent and impartial general for want of merit—*cricketal* merit. “Not good enough,” was his pithy answer. Then our worthy neighbour, the half-pay lieutenant, offered his services—he, too, though with some hesitation and modesty, was refused—“Not quite young enough” was his sentence. John Strong, the exceedingly long son of our dwarfish mason, was the next candidate,—a nice youth—every body likes John Strong,—and a willing, but so tall and so limp, bent in the middle—a thread-paper, six feet high! We were all afraid that, in spite of his name, his strength would never hold out. “Wait till next year, John,” quoth William Grey, with all the dignified seniority of twenty speaking to eighteen. “Coper’s a year younger,” said John. “Coper’s a foot shorter,” replied William: so John retired; and the eleventh man remained unchosen, almost till the eleventh hour. The eve of the match arrived, and the post was still vacant, when a little boy of fifteen, David Willis, brother to Robert, admitted by accident to the last practice, saw eight of them out, and was voted in by acclamation.

That Sunday evening’s practice (for Monday was the important day) was a period of great anxiety, and, to say the truth, of great pleasure. There is something strangely delightful in the innocent spirit of party. To be one of a numerous body, to be authorised to say *we*, to have a rightful interest in triumph or defeat, is gra-

tifying at once to social feeling and to personal pride. There was not a ten-year old urchin, or a septuagenary woman in the parish, who did not feel an additional importance, a reflected consequence, in speaking of "our side." An election interests in the same way; but that feeling is less pure. Money is there, and hatred, and politics, and lies. Oh, to be a voter, or a voter's wife, comes nothing near the genuine and hearty sympathy of belonging to a parish, breathing the same air, looking on the same trees, listening to the same nightingales! Talk of a patriotic elector!—Give me a parochial patriot, a man who loves his parish! Even we, the female partisans, may partake the common ardour. I am sure I did. I never, though tolerably eager and enthusiastic at all times, remember being in a more delicious state of excitation than on the eve of that battle. Our hopes waxed stronger and stronger. Those of our players, who were present, were excellent. William Grey got forty notches off his own bat; and that brilliant hitter Tom Coper gained eight from two successive balls. As the evening advanced, too, we had encouragement of another sort. A spy, who had been despatched to reconnoitre the enemy's quarters, returned from their practising ground, with a most consolatory report. "Really," said Charles Grover, our intelligencer—a fine old steady judge, one who had played well in his day—"they are no better

than so many old women. Any five of ours would beat their eleven." This sent us to bed in high spirits.

Morning dawned less favourably. The sky promised a series of deluging showers, and kept its word, as English skies are wont to do on such occasions; and a lamentable message arrived at the head-quarters from our trusty comrade Joel Brent. His master, a great farmer, had begun the hay-harvest that very morning, and Joel, being as eminent in one field as in another, could not be spared. Imagine Joel's plight! the most ardent of all our eleven! a knight held back from the tourney! a soldier from the battle! The poor swain was inconsolable. At last, one who is always ready to do a good-natured action, great or little, set forth to back his petition; and, by dint of appealing to the public spirit of our worthy neighbour, and the state of the barometer, talking alternately of the parish honour and thunder showers, of lost matches and sopped hay, he carried his point, and returned triumphantly with the delighted Joel.

In the meantime we became sensible of another defalcation. On calling over our roll, Brown was missing; and the spy of the preceding night, Charles Grover,—the universal scout and messenger of the village, a man who will run half-a-dozen miles for a pint of beer, who does errands for the very love of the

trade, who, if he had been a lord, would have been an ambassador—was instantly despatched to summon the truant. His report spread general consternation. Brown had set off at four o'clock in the morning to play in a cricket-match at M., a little town twelve miles off, which had been his last residence. Here was desertion! Here was treachery! Here was treason against that goodly state, our parish! To send James Brown to Coventry was the immediate resolution; but even that seemed too light a punishment for such delinquency. Then how we cried him down! At ten, on Sunday-night, (for the rascal had actually practised with us, and never said a word of his intended disloyalty,) he was our faithful mate, and the best player (take him for all in all) of the eleven. At ten in the morning he had run away, and we were well rid of him; he was no batter compared with William Grey or Tom Coper; not fit to wipe the shoes of Samuel Long, as a bowler; nothing of a scout to John Simmons; the boy David Willis was worth fifty of him—

“ I trust we have within our realm
Five hundred good as he.”

was the universal sentiment. So we took tall John Strong, who, with an incurable hankering after the honour of being admitted, had kept constantly with

the players, to take the chance of some such accident—we took John for our *pis-aller*. I never saw any one prouder than the good-humoured lad was of this not very flattering piece of preferment.

John Strong was elected, and Brown sent to Coventry; and, when I first heard of his delinquency, I thought the punishment only too mild for the crime. But I have since learned the secret history of the offence; (if we could know the secret histories of all offences, how much better the world would seem than it does now!) and really my wrath is much abated. It was a piece of gallantry, of devotion to the sex, or rather a chivalrous obedience to one chosen fair. I must tell my readers the story. Mary Allen, the prettiest girl of M., had it seems revenged upon our blacksmith the numberless inconstancies of which he stood accused. He was in love over head and ears, but the nymph was cruel. She said no, and no, and no, and poor Brown, three times rejected, at last resolved to leave the place, partly in despair, and partly in that hope which often mingles strangely with a lover's despair, the hope that when he was gone he should be missed. He came home to his brother's accordingly; but for five weeks he heard nothing from or of the inexorable Mary, and was glad to beguile his own "vexing thoughts," by endeavouring to create in his mind an artificial and factitious interest in our

cricket-match—all unimportant as such a trifle must have seemed to a man in love. Poor James, however, is a social and warm-hearted person, not likely to resist a contagious sympathy. As the time for the play advanced, the interest which he had at first affected became genuine and sincere : and he was really, when he left the ground on Sunday-night, almost as enthusiastically absorbed in the event of the next day as Joel Brent himself. He little foresaw the new and delightful interest which awaited him at home, where, on the moment of his arrival, his sister-in-law and confidante, presented him with a billet from the lady of his heart. It had, with the usual delay of letters sent by private hands, in that rank of life, loitered on the road in a degree inconceivable to those who are accustomed to the punctual speed of the post, and had taken ten days for its twelve-miles' journey. Have my readers any wish to see this *billet-doux*? I can show them (but in strict confidence) a literal copy. It was addressed,

“ For mistur jem browne

“ blaxmith by

“ S.”

The inside ran thus :—“ Mistur browne this is to Inform yew that oure parish playes bramley men next monday is a week, i think we shall lose without yew. from your humbell servant to command

“ MARY ALLEN.”

Was there ever a prettier relenting? a summons more flattering, more delicate, more irresistible? The precious epistle was undated; but, having ascertained who brought it, and found, by cross-examining the messenger, that the Monday in question was the very next day, we were not surprised to find that *Mistur browne* forgot his engagement to us, forgot all but Mary and Mary's letter, and set off at four o'clock the next morning to walk twelve miles, and play for her parish and in her sight. Really we must not send James Brown to Coventry—must we? Though if, as his sister-in-law tells our damsel Harriet he hopes to do, he should bring the fair Mary home as his bride, he will not greatly care how little we say to him. But he must not be sent to Coventry—True-love forbid!

At last we were all assembled, and marched down to H. common, the appointed ground, which, though in our dominions according to the map, was the constant practising place of our opponents, and *terra incognita* to us. We found our adversaries on the ground as we expected, for our various delays had hindered us from taking the field so early as we wished; and, as soon as we had settled all preliminaries, the match began.

But, alas! I have been so long settling my preliminaries that I have left myself no room for the detail.

of our victory, and must squeeze the account of our grand achievements into as little compass as Cowley, when he crammed the names of eleven of his mistresses into the narrow space of four eight-syllable lines. *They* began the warfare—these boastful men of B. And what think you, gentle reader, was the amount of their innings? These challengers—the famous eleven—how many did they get? Think! imagine! guess!—You cannot?—Well!—they got twenty-two, or rather they got twenty; for two of theirs were short notches, and would never have been allowed, only that, seeing what they were made of, we and our umpire were not particular.—They should have had twenty more, if they had chosen to claim them. Oh, how well we fielded! and how well we bowled! our good play had quite as much to do with their miserable failure as their bad. Samuel Long is a slow bowler, George Simmons a fast one, and the change from Long's lobbing to Simmons's fast balls posed them completely. Poor simpletons! they were always wrong, expecting the slow for the quick, and the quick for the slow. Well, we went in. And what were our innings? Guess again!—guess! A hundred and sixty-nine! in spite of soaking showers, and wretched ground, where the ball would not run a yard, we headed them by a hundred and forty-seven; and then they gave in, as well they might. William

Grey pressed them much to try another innings. "There was so much chance," as he courteously observed, "in cricket, that advantageous as our position seemed, we might, very possibly, be overtaken. The B. men had better try." But they were beaten sulky, and would not move—to my great disappointment; I wanted to prolong the pleasure of success. What a glorious sensation it is to be for five hours together winning—winning—winning! always feeling what a whist-player feels when he takes up four honours, seven trumps! Who would think that a little bit of leather, and two pieces of wood, had such a delightful and delighting power?

The only drawback on my enjoyment, was the failure of the pretty boy, David Willis, who injudiciously put in first, and playing for the first time in a match amongst men and strangers, who talked to him, and stared at him, was seized with such a fit of shame-faced shyness, that he could scarcely hold his bat, and was bowled out, without a stroke, from actual nervousness. "He will come of that," Tom Coper says.—I am afraid he will. I wonder whether Tom had ever any modesty to lose. Our other modest lad, John Strong, did very well; his length told in fielding, and he got good fame. Joel Brent, the rescued mower, got into a scrape, and out of it again; his fortune for the day. He ran out his mate, Samuel Long; who, I

do believe, but for the excess of Joel's eagerness, would have staid in till this time, by which exploit he got into sad disgrace; and then he himself got thirty-seven runs, which redeemed his reputation. William Grey made a hit which actually lost the cricket-ball. We think she lodged in a hedge, a quarter of a mile off, but nobody could find her. And George Simmons had nearly lost his shoe, which he tossed away in a passion, for having been caught out, owing to the ball glancing against it. These, together with a very complete somerset of Ben Appleton, our long-stop, who floundered about in the mud, making faces and attitudes as laughable as Grimaldi, none could tell whether by accident or design, were the chief incidents of the scene of action. Amongst the spectators nothing remarkable occurred, beyond the general calamity of two or three drenchings, except that a form, placed by the side of a hedge, under a very insufficient shelter, was knocked into the ditch, in a sudden rush of the cricketers to escape a pelting shower, by which means all parties shared the fate of Ben Appleton, some on land and some by water; and that, amidst the scramble, a saucy gipsy of a girl contrived to steal, from the knee of the demure and well-apparelled Samuel Long, a smart handkerchief; which his careful dame had tied around it, to preserve his new (what is the mincing feminine word?) his new—inexpressibles;

thus reversing the story of Desdemona, and causing the new Othello to call aloud for his handkerchief, to the great diversion of the company. And so we parted ; the players retired to their supper, and we to our homes ; all wet through, all good-humoured, and all happy—except the losers.

To-day we are happy too. Hats, with ribands in them, go glancing up and down ; and William Grey says, with a proud humility, “ We do not challenge any parish ; but, if we be challenged, we are ready.”

TOM CORDERY.

THERE are certain things and persons that seem as if they could never die: things of such vigour and hardiness, that they seem constituted for an interminable duration, a sort of immortality. An old pollard oak of my acquaintance used to give me this impression. Never was tree so gnarled, so knotted, so full of crooked life. Garlanded with ivy and woodbine, almost bending under the weight of its own rich leaves and acorns, tough, vigorous, lusty, concentrating as it were the very spirit of vitality into its own curtailed proportions,—could that tree ever die? I have asked myself twenty times, as I stood looking on the deep water over which it hung, and in which it seemed to live again—would that strong dwarf ever fall? Alas! the question is answered. Walking by the spot to-day—this very day—there it lay prostrate; the ivy still clinging about it, the twigs swelling with sap, and putting forth already the early buds. There it lay a victim to the taste and skill of some admirer

of British woods, who with the tact of Ugo Foscolo (that prince of amateurs) has discovered in the knots and gnarls of the exterior coat the leopard-like beauty which is concealed within the trunk. There it lies, a type of sylvan instability, fallen like an emperor. Another piece of strong nature in a human form used to convey to me exactly the same feeling—and he is gone too! Tom Cordery is dead. The bell is tolling for him at this very moment. Tom Cordery dead! the words seem almost a contradiction. One is tempted to send for the sexton and the undertaker, to undig the grave, to force open the coffin-lid—there must be some mistake. But, alas! it is too true; the typhus fever, that axe which levels the strong as the weak, has hewed him down at a blow. Poor Tom Cordery!

This human oak grew on the wild North-of-Hampshire country, of which I have before made honourable mention; a country of heath, and hill, and forest, partly reclaimed, inclosed, and planted by some of the greater proprietors, but for the most part uncultivated and uncivilised; a proper refuge for wild animals of every species. Of these the most notable was my friend Tom Cordery, who presented in his own person no unfit emblem of the district in which he lived—the gentlest of savages, the wildest of civilised men. He was by calling rat-catcher, hare-finder, and broom-

maker ; a triad of trades which he has substituted for the one grand profession of poaching, which he had followed in his younger days with unrivalled talent and success, and would, undoubtedly, have pursued till his death, had not the bursting of an overloaded gun unluckily shot off his left hand. As it was, he still contrived to mingle a little of his old unlawful occupation with his honest callings ; was a reference of high authority amongst the young aspirants, an adviser of undoubted honour and secrecy—suspected, and more than suspected, as being one “ who, though he played no more, o’erlooked the cards.” Yet he kept to windward of the law, and indeed contrived to be on such terms of social and even friendly intercourse with the guardians of the game on M. Common, as may be said to prevail between reputed thieves and the myrmidons of justice in the neighbourhood of Bow-street. Indeed his especial crony, the head-keeper, used sometimes to hint, when Tom, elevated by ale, had provoked him by overcrowding, “ that a stump was no bad shield, and that to shoot off a hand and a bit of an arm for a blind, would be nothing to so daring a chap as Tom Cordery.” This conjecture, never broached till the keeper was warm with wrath and liquor, and Tom fairly out of hearing, always seemed to me a little super-subtle ; but it is certain that Tom’s new professions did bear rather a suspicious analogy to the

old, and the ferrets, and terriers, and mongrels by whom he was surrounded, "did really look," as the worthy keeper observed, "fitter to find Christian hares and pheasants, than rats and such vermin." So in good truth did Tom himself. Never did any human being look more like that sort of sportsman commonly called a poacher. He was a tall, finely-built man, with a prodigious stride, that cleared the ground like a horse, and a power of continuing his slow and steady speed, that seemed nothing less than miraculous. Neither man, nor horse, nor dog, could out-tire him. He had a bold, undaunted presence, and an evident strength and power of bone and muscle. You might see by looking at him, that he did not know what fear meant. In his youth he had fought more battles than any man in the forest. He was as if born without nerves, totally insensible to the recoils and disgusts of humanity. I have known him take up a huge adder, cut off its head, and then deposit the living and writhing body in his brimless hat, and walking with it coiling and wreathing about his head, like another Medusa, till the sport of the day was over, and he carried it home to secure the fat. With all this iron stubbornness of nature, he was of a most mild and gentle demeanour, had a fine placidity of countenance, and a quick blue eye beaming with good humour. His face was sunburnt into one general

pale vermilion hue that overspread all his features ; his very hair was sunburnt too. His costume was generally a smock-frock of no doubtful complexion, dirt-coloured, which hung round him in tatters like fringe, rather augmenting than diminishing the freedom, and, if I may so say, the gallantry of his bearing. This frock was furnished with a huge inside pocket, in which to deposit the game killed by his patrons—for of his three employments, that which consisted of finding hares for the great farmers and small gentry, who were wont to course on the common, was by far the most profitable and most pleasing to him, and to them. Every body liked Tom Cordery. He had himself an aptness to like, which is almost certain to be repaid in kind—the very dogs knew him, and loved him, and would beat for him almost as soon as for their master. Even May, the most sagacious of greyhounds, appreciated his talents, and would almost as soon listen to Tom sohoing as to old Tray giving tongue.

Nor was his conversation less agreeable to the other part of the company. Servants and masters were equally desirous to secure Tom. Besides his general and professional familiarity with beasts and birds, their ways and doings, a knowledge so minute and accurate, that it might have put to shame many a professed naturalist, he had no small acquaintance with the goings-on of that unfeathered biped called man ; in short, he was,

next after Lucy, who recognised his rivalry by hating, decrying, and undervaluing him, by far the best news-gatherer of the country side. His news he of course picked up on the civilised side of the parish, (there is no gossiping in the forest,) partly at that well-frequented inn the Red Lion, of which Tom was a regular and noted supporter—partly amongst his several employers, and partly by his own sagacity. In the matter of marriages, (pairings he was wont to call them,) he relied chiefly on his own skill in noting certain preliminary indications; and certainly for a guesser by profession and a very bold one, he was astonishingly often right. At the alehouse especially, he was of the first authority. An air of mild importance, a diplomatic reserve on some points, great smoothness of speech, and that gentleness which is so often the result of conscious power, made him there an absolute ruler. Perhaps the effect of these causes might be a little aided by the latent dread which that power inspired in others. Many an exploit had proved that Tom Cordery's one arm was fairly worth any two on the common. The pommelling of Bob Arlott, and the levelling of Jem Serle to the earth by one swing of a huge old hare, (which unusual weapon was by the way the first-slain of Mayflower, on its way home to us in that walking cupboard, his pocket, when the unlucky rencontre with Jem Serle broke two heads, the dead

and the living,) arguments such as these might have some cogency at the Red Lion.

But he managed every body, as your gentle-mannered person is apt to do. Even the rude 'squires and rough farmers, his temporary masters, he managed, particularly as far as concerned the beat, and was sure to bring them round to his own peculiar fancies or prejudices, however strongly their own wishes might turn them aside from the direction indicated, and however often Tom's sagacity in that instance might have been found at fault. Two spots in the large wild inclosures into which the heath had been divided were his especial favourites; the Hundred Acres, alias the Poor Allotment, alias the Burnt Common—(Do any or all of these titles convey any notion of the real destination of that many-named place? a piece of moor land portioned out to serve for fuel to the poor of the parish)—this was one. Oh the barrenness of this miserable moor! Flat, marshy, dingy, bare. Here that piece of green treachery, a bog; there parched, and pared, and shrivelled, and black with smoke and ashes; utterly desolate and wretched every where, except where amidst the desolation blossomed, as in mockery, the enamelled gentianella. No hares ever came there; they had too much taste. Yet thither would Tom lead his unwary employers; thither, however warned, or cautioned, or experienced, would he by reasoning or in-

duction, or gentle persuasion, or actual fraud, entice the hapless gentlemen; and then to see him with his rabble of finders pacing up and down this precious "sitting-ground," (for so was Tom, thriftless liar, wont to call it,) pretending to look for game, counterfeiting a meuse; forging a form; and telling a story some ten years old of a famous hare once killed in that spot by his honour's favourite bitch Marygold. I never could thoroughly understand whether it were design, a fear that too many hares might be killed, or a real and honest mistake, a genuine prejudice in favour of the place, that influenced Tom Cordery in this point. Half the one, perhaps, and half the other. Mixed motives, let Pope and his disciples say what they will, are by far the commonest in this parti-coloured world. Or he had shared the fate of greater men, and lied till he believed—a coursing Cromwell, beginning in hypocrisy and ending in fanaticism. Another pet spot was the Gallows-piece, an inclosure almost as large as the Hundred Acres, where a gibbet had once borne the bodies of two murderers, with the chains and bones, even in my remembrance, clanking and creaking in the wind. The gibbet was gone now; but the name remained, and the feeling, deep, sad, and shuddering. The place, too, was wild, awful, fearful; a heathy, furzy spot, sinking into broken hollows, where murderers might lurk; a few withered pines at the upper end, and

amongst them, half hidden by the brambles, the stone in which the gallows had been fixed;—the bones must have been mouldering beneath. All Tom's eloquence, seconded by two capital courses, failed to drag me thither a second time.

Tom was not, however, without that strong sense of natural beauty which they who live amongst the wildernesses and fastnesses of nature so often exhibit. One spot, where the common trenches on the civilized world, was scarcely less his admiration than mine. It is a high hill, half covered with furze, and heath, and broom, and sinking abruptly down to a large pond, almost a lake, covered with wild water fowl. The ground, richly clothed with wood, oak, and beech, and elm, rises on the other side with equal abruptness, as if shutting in those glassy waters from all but the sky, which shines so brightly in their clear bosom: just in the bottom peeps a small sheltered farm, whose wreaths of light smoke and the white glancing wings of the wild ducks, as they flit across the lake, are all that give token of motion or of life. I have stood there in utter oblivion of greyhound or of hare, till moments have swelled to minutes, and minutes to hours; and so has Tom, conveying, by his exclamations of delight at its "pleasantness," exactly the same feeling which a poet or a painter (for it breathes the very spirit of calm and sunshiny beauty that a master-painter loves) would ex-

press by different but not truer praise. He called his own home "pleasant" too; and there, though one loves to hear any home so called—there, I must confess, that favourite phrase, which I like almost as well as they who have no other, did seem rather misapplied. And yet it was finely placed, very finely. It stood in a sort of defile, where a road almost perpendicular wound from the top of a steep abrupt hill, crowned with a tuft of old Scottish firs, into a dingle of fern and wild brushwood. A shallow, sullen stream oozed from the bank on one side, and, after forming a rude channel across the road, sank into a dark, deep pool, half hidden amongst the willows. Behind these willows, in a nook between them and the hill, rose the uncouth and shapeless cottage of Tom Cordery. It is a scene which hangs upon the eye and the memory, striking, grand, almost sublime, and above all eminently foreign. No English painter would choose such a subject for an English landscape; no one in a picture would take it for English. It might pass for one of those scenes which have furnished models to Salvator Rosa. Tom's cottage was, however, very thoroughly national and characteristic; a low, ruinous hovel, the door of which was fastened with a sedulous attention to security, that contrasted strangely with the tattered thatch of the roof, and the half broken windows. No garden, no pigsty,

no pens for geese, none of the usual signs of cottage habitation:—yet the house was covered with nondescript dwellings, and the very walls were animate with their extraordinary tenants; pheasants, partridges, rabbits, tame wild ducks, half tame hares, and their enemies by nature and education, the ferrets, terriers, and mongrels, of whom his retinue consisted. Great ingenuity had been evinced in keeping separate these jarring elements; and by dint of hutches, cages, fences, kennel, and half a dozen little hurdled inclosures resembling the sort of courts which children are apt to build round their card-houses, peace was in general tolerably well preserved. Frequent sounds, however, of fear or of anger, as their several instincts were aroused, gave token that it was but a forced and hollow truce, and at such times the clamour was prodigious. Tom had the remarkable tenderness for animals when domesticated, which is so often found in those whose sole vocation seems to be their destruction in the field; and the one long, straggling, unceiled, barn-like room, which served for kitchen, bed-chamber, and hall, was cumbered with bipeds and quadrupeds of all kinds and descriptions—the sick, the delicate, the newly caught, the lying-in. In the midst of this menagerie sate Tom's wife, (for he was married, though without a family—married to a woman lame of a leg as he himself was mi-

nus an arm,) now trying to quiet her noisy inmates, now to outscold them. How long his friend the keeper would have continued to wink at this den of live game, none can say: the roof fairly fell in during the deep snow of last winter, killing, as poor Tom observed, two as fine litters of rabbits as ever were kittened. Remotely, I have no doubt that he himself fell a sacrifice to this misadventure. The overseer, to whom he applied to re-instate his beloved habitation, decided that the walls would never bear another roof, and removed him and his wife, as an especial favour, to a tidy, snug, comfortable room in the workhouse, The workhouse! From that hour poor Tom visibly altered. He lost his hilarity and independence. It was a change such as he had himself often inflicted, a complete change of habits, a transition from the wild to the tame. No labour was demanded of him; he went about as before, finding hares, killing rats, selling brooms, but the spirit of the man was departed. He talked of the quiet of his old abode, and the noise of the new; complained of children and other bad company; and looked down on his neighbours with the sort of contempt with which a cock pheasant might regard a barn-door fowl. Most of all did he, braced into a gipsy-like defiance of wet and cold, grumble at the warmth and dryness of his apartment. He used to foretell that it would kill him, and

assuredly it did so. Never could the typhus fever have found out that wild hill side, or have lurked under that broken roof. The free touch of the air would have chased the dæmon. Alas, poor Tom! warmth, and snugness, and comfort, whole windows, and an entire ceiling, were the death of him. Alas, poor Tom!

AN OLD BACHELOR.

THERE is no effect of the subtle operation of the association of ideas more universal and more curious than the manner in which the most trivial circumstances recall particular persons to our memory. Sometimes these glances of recollection are purely pleasurable. Thus I have a double liking for May-day, as being the birth-day of a dear friend whose fair idea bursts upon me with the first sunbeam of that glad morning; and I can never hear certain airs of Mozart and Handel without seeming to catch an echo of that sweetest voice in which I first learnt to love them. Pretty often, however, the point of association is less elegant, and occasionally it is tolerably ludicrous. We happened to-day to have for dinner a couple of wild-ducks, the first of the season; and as the master of the house, who is so little of an epicure that I am sure he would never while he lived, out of its feathers, know a wild-duck from a tame,—whilst he, with a little affectation of science, was squeezing the lemon and mixing Cayenne pepper with the gravy, two

of us exclaimed in a breath, "Poor Mr. Sidney!"—"Aye," rejoined the squeezer of lemons, "poor Sidney! I think he would have allowed that these ducks were done even to half a turn." And then he told the story more elaborately to a young visitor, to whom Mr. Sidney was unknown;—how, after eating the best parts of a couple of wild-ducks, which all the company pronounced to be the finest and the best dressed wild-ducks ever brought to table, that judicious critic in the gastronomic art limited the too-sweeping praise by gravely asserting, that the birds were certainly excellent, and that the cookery would have been excellent also, had they not been roasted half a turn too much. Mr. Sidney has been dead these fifteen years; but no wild-ducks have ever appeared on our homely board without recalling that observation. It is his memorable saying; his one good thing.

Mr. Sidney was, as might be conjectured, an epicure; he was also an old bachelor, a clergyman, and senior fellow of * * College, a post which he had long filled, being, although only a second son, so well provided for that he could afford to reject living after living in expectation of one favourite rectory, to which he had taken an early fancy from the pleasantness of the situation and the imputed salubrity of the air. Of the latter quality, indeed, he used to give an instance, which, however satisfactory as confirming his pre-

possession, could hardly have been quite agreeable, as preventing him from gratifying it;—namely, the extraordinary and provoking longevity of the incumbent, who at upwards of ninety gave no sign of decay, and bade fair to emulate the age of old Parr.

Whilst waiting for the expected living, Mr. Sidney, who disliked a college residence, built himself a very pretty house in our neighbourhood, which he called his home; and where he lived, as much as a love of Bath and Brighton and London and lords would let him. He counted many noble families amongst his near connexions, and passed a good deal of his time at their country seats—a life for which he was by character and habit peculiarly fitted.

In person he was a tall stout gentlemanly man, “about fifty, or by'r lady inclining to threescore,” with fine features, a composed gravity of countenance and demeanour, a bald head most accurately powdered, and a very graceful bow—quite the pattern of an elderly man of fashion. His conversation was in excellent keeping with the calm imperturbability of his countenance and the sedate gravity of his manner,—smooth, dull, common-place, exceedingly safe, and somewhat imposing. He spoke so little, that people really fell into the mistake of imagining that he thought; and the tone of decision with which he would advance some second-hand opinion, was well calculated to confirm the

mistake. Gravity was certainly his chief characteristic, and yet it was not a clerical gravity either. He had none of the generic marks of his profession. Although perfectly decorous in life and word and thought, no stranger ever took Mr. Sidney for a clergyman. He never did any duty any where, that ever I heard of, except the agreeable duty of saying grace before dinner; and even that was often performed by some lay host, in pure forgetfulness of his guest's ordination. Indeed, but for the direction of his letters, and an eye to * * * Rectory, I am persuaded that the circumstance might have slipped out of his own recollection.

His quality of old bachelor was more perceptible. There lurked under all his polish, well covered but not concealed, the quiet selfishness, the little whims, the precise habits, the primness and priggishness of that disconsolate condition. His man Andrews, for instance, valet, groom, and body-servant abroad; butler, cook, caterer, and major domo at home; tall, portly, powdered and black-coated as his master, and like him in all things but the knowing pig-tail which stuck out horizontally above his shirt-collar, giving a ludicrous dignity to his appearance;—Andrews, who, constant as the dial pointed nine, carried up his chocolate and shaving water, and regular as “the chimes at midnight,” prepared his white-wine whey; who never forgot his gouty shoe in travelling, (once for two days he

had a slight touch of that gentlemanly disorder,) and never gave him the newspaper unaired;—to whom could this jewel of a valet, this matchless piece of clock-work belong, but an old bachelor? And his little dog Viper, unparagoned of terriers, black, sleek, sharp, and shrewish; who would beg and sneeze and fetch and carry like a Christian; eat olives and sweetmeats and mustard, drink coffee and wine and liqueurs;—who but an old bachelor could have taught Viper his multifarious accomplishments?

Little Viper was a most useful person in his way; for although Mr. Sidney was a very creditable acquaintance to meet on the King's highway, (your dull man, if he rides well, should never think of dismounting,) or even on the level ground of a carpet in the crowd of a large party; yet when he happened to drop in to take a family dinner—a pretty frequent habit of his when in the country—then Viper's talents were inestimable in relieving the ennuï occasioned by that grave piece of gentility his master, “not only *dull* in himself, but the cause of *dullness* in others.” Any thing to pass away the heavy hours, till whist or piquet relieved the female world from his intolerable silence.

In other respects these visits were sufficiently perplexing. Every housewife can tell what a formidable guest is an epicure who comes to take pot-luck—how sure it is to be bad luck, especially when the unfortu-

nate hostess lives five miles from a market town. Mr. Sidney always came unseasonably, on washing-day, or Saturday, or the day before a great party. So sure as we had a scrap dinner, so sure came he. My dear mother, who with true benevolence and hospitality cared much for her guest's comfort and nothing for her own pride, used to grieve over his discomfiture, and try all that could be done by potted meats and omelettes, and little things tossed up on a sudden to amend the bill of fare. But cookery is an obstinate art, and will have its time;—however you may force the component parts, there is no forcing a dinner. Mr. Sidney had the evil habit of arriving just as the last bell rang; and in spite of all the hurry scurry in the kitchen department, the new niceties and the old homely dishes were sure to disagree. There was a total want of keeping. The kickshaws were half raw, the solids were mere rags; the vegetables were cold, the soup was scalding: no shallots to the rump steaks; no mushrooms with the broiled chicken; no fish; no oysters; no ice; no pine-apples. Poor Mr. Sidney! He must have had a great regard for us to put up with our bad dinners.

Perhaps the chance of a rubber had something to do with his visits to our house. If there be such a thing as a ruling passion, the love of whist was his. Cards were not merely the amusement, but the business of his life. I do not mean as a money-making speculation;

for although he belonged to a fashionable club in London, and to every card-meeting of decent gentility within reach of his country home, he never went beyond a regular moderate stake, and could not be induced to bet even by the rashest defyer of calculation, or the most provoking undervaluer of his play. It always seemed to me that he regarded whist as far too important and scientific a pursuit to be degraded into an affair of gambling. It had in his eyes all the dignity of a study; an acquirement equally gentlemanly and clerical. It was undoubtedly his test of ability. He had the value of a man of family and a man of the world, for rank, and wealth, and station, and dignities of all sorts. No human being entertained a higher respect for a king, a prince, a prime minister, a duke, a bishop, or a lord. But these were conventional feelings. His genuine and unfeigned veneration was reserved for him who played a good rubber, a praise he did not easily give. He was a capital player himself, and held all his country competitors, except one, in supreme and undisguised contempt, which they endured to admiration. I wonder they did not send him to Coventry. He was the most disagreeable partner in the world, and nearly as unpleasant an adversary; for he not only enforced the Pythagorean law of silence, which makes one hate whist so, but used to distribute quite impartially to every one at table little disagreeable observations on

every card they played. It was not scolding, or grumbling, or fretting; one has a sympathy with those expressions of feeling, and at the worst can scold again; it was a smooth polite commentary on the errors of the party, delivered in the calm tone of undoubted superiority with which a great critic will sometimes take a small poet, or a batch of poets, to task in a review. How the people could bear it!—but the world is a good-natured world, and does not like a man the less for treating it scornfully.

So passed six evenings out of the seven with Mr. Sidney; for it was pretty well known that, on the rare occurrence of his spending a day at home without company, his fac-totum Andrews used to have the honour of being beaten by his master in a snug game at double dummy; but what he did with himself on Sunday occasioned me some speculation. Never in my life did I see him take up a book, although he sometimes talked of Shakspeare and Milton, and Johnson and Burke, in a manner which proved that he had heard of such things; and as to the newspaper, which he did read, that was generally conned over long before night; besides he never exhibited spectacles, and I have a notion that he could not read newspaper type at night without them. How he could possibly get through the after-coffee hours on a Sunday puzzled me long. Chance solved the problem. He came to call on us after

church, and agreed to dine and sleep at our house. The moment tea was over, without the slightest apology or attempt at conversation, he drew his chair to the fire, set his feet on the fender, and fell fast asleep in the most comfortable and orderly manner possible. It was evidently a weekly habit. Every sense and limb seemed composed to it. Viper looked up in his face, curled himself round on the hearth rug, and went to sleep too; and Andrews, just as the clock struck twelve, came in to wake him, that he might go to bed. It was clearly an invariable custom; a settled thing.

His house and grounds were kept in the neatest manner possible. There was something even disagreeable in the excessive nicety, the Dutch preciseness of the shining gravel walks, the smooth shaven turf of the lawn, and the fine sifted mould of the shrubberies. A few dead leaves or scattered flowers, even a weed or two, any thing to take away from the artificial toy-like look of the place, would have been an improvement. Mr. Sidney, however, did not think so. He actually caused his gardener to remove those littering plants called roses and gum cistuses. Other flowers fared little better. No sooner were they in bloom, than he pulled them up for fear they should drop. In doors, matters were still worse. The rooms and furniture were very handsome, abounding in the luxurious Turkey carpets, the sofas, easy chairs, and ottomans,

which his habits required ; and yet I never in my life saw any house which looked less comfortable. Every thing was so constantly in its place, so provokingly in order, so full of naked nicety, so thoroughly old-bachelorish. No work ! no books ! no music ! no flowers ! But for those two things of life, Viper and a sparkling fire, one might have thought the place uninhabited. Once a year, indeed, it gave signs of animation, in the shape of a Christmas party. That was Mr. Sidney's shining time. Nothing could exceed the smiling hospitality of the host, or the lavish profusion of the entertainment. It breathed the very spirit of a welcome splendidly liberal ; and little Viper frisked and bounded, and Andrews's tail vibrated (I was going to say wagged) with cordiality and pleasure. Andrews, on these occasions, laid aside his " customary black " in favour of a blue coat and a white silk court waistcoat, with a light running pattern of embroidery and silver spangles, assumed to do honour to his master and the company. How much he enjoyed the applause which the wines and the cookery elicited from the gentlemen ; and how anxiously he would direct the ladies' attention to a MS. collection of riddles, the compilation of some deceased countess, laid on the drawing-room table for their amusement between dinner and tea. Once, I remember, he carried his attention so far as to produce a gone-by toy, called a bandalore, for the recreation of

myself and another little girl, admitted by virtue of the Christmas holidays to this annual festival. Poor Andrews! I am convinced that he considered the entertainment of the visitors quite as much his affair as his master's; and certainly they both succeeded. Never did parties pass more pleasantly. On those evenings Mr. Sidney even forgot to find fault at whist.

At last, towards the end of a severe winter, during which he had suffered much from repeated colds, the rectory of * * * became vacant, and our worthy neighbour hastened to take possession. The day before his journey he called on us in the highest spirits, anticipating a renewal of health and youth in this favourite spot, and approaching nearer than I had ever heard him to a jest on the subject of looking out for a wife. Married or single, he made us promise to visit him during the ensuing summer. Alas! long before the summer arrived, our poor friend was dead. He had waited for this living thirty years; he did not enjoy it thirty days.

A VILLAGE BEAU.

THE finest young man in our village is undoubtedly Joel Brent, half-brother to my Lizzy. They are alike too; as much alike as a grown-up person and a little child of different sexes well can be; alike in a vigorous uprightness of form, light, firm, and compact as possible; alike in the bright, sparkling, triumphant blue eye, the short-curved upper lip, the brown wavy hair, the white forehead and sunburnt cheeks, and above all, in the singular spirit and gaiety of their countenance and demeanour, the constant expression of life and glee, to which they owe the best and rarest part of their attractiveness. They seem, and they are two of the happiest and merriest creatures that ever trode on the greensward. Really to see Joel walking by the side of his team, (for this enviable mortal, the pride of our village, is by calling a carter), to see him walking, on a fine sunny morning, by the side of his bell-team, the fore-horse decked with ribbons and flowers like a countess on the birth-day, as

consciously handsome as his driver, the long whip poised gracefully on his shoulder, his little sister in his hand, and his dog Ranger (a beautiful red and white spaniel—every thing that belongs to Joel is beautiful) frisking about them ;—to see this group, and to hear the merry clatter formed by Lizzy's tongue, Joel's whistling, and Ranger's delighted bark, is enough to put an amateur of pleasant sounds and happy faces in good humour for the day.

It is a grateful sight in other respects, for Joel is a very picturesque person, just such an one as a painter would select for the fore-ground of some English landscape, where nature is shewn in all her loveliness. His costume is the very perfection of rustic coquetry, of that grace, which all admire and few practice, the grace of adaptation, the beauty of fitness. No one ever saw Joel in that wretched piece of deformity a coat, or that still wretcheder apology for a coat a dock-tailed jacket. Broad-cloth, the "common stale" of peer and peasant, approaches him not ; neither does "the poor creature" fustian. His upper garment consists of that prettier jacket without skirts, call it for the more grace a doublet, of dark velveteen, hanging open over his waistcoat, giving a Spanish or an Italian air to his whole appearance, and setting off to great advantage his trim yet manly shape. To this he adds a silk handkerchief, tied very loosely round his neck,

a shirt collar open so as to shew his throat, as you commonly see in the portraits of artists, very loose trowsers, and a straw hat. Sometimes in cold weather he throws over all a smock-frock, and last winter brought up a fashion amongst our lads, by assuming one of that blue high Waterloo, such as butchers wear. As soon as all his comrades had provided themselves with a similar piece of rustic finery, he abandoned his, and indeed generally sticks to his velveteen jacket, which, by some magical influence of cleanliness and neatness, always looks new. I cannot imagine how he contrives it, but dirt never hangs upon Joel; even a fall at cricket in the summer, or a tumble on the ice in the winter, fails to soil him; and he is so ardent in his diversions, and so little disposed to let his coxcombry interfere with his sports, that both have been pretty often tried; the former especially.

Ever since William Grey's secession, which took place shortly after our great match, for no cause assigned, Joel has been the leader and chief of our cricketers. Perhaps, indeed, Joel's rapid improvement might be one cause of William's withdrawal, for, without attributing any thing like envy or jealousy to these fine young men, we all know that "two stars keep not their motion in one sphere," and so forth, and if it were absolutely necessary that either our "Harry Hotspur, or the Prince of Wales," should abdi-

cate that fair kingdom the cricket-ground, I must say that I am content to retain our present champion. Joel is in my mind the better player, joining to William's agility, and certainty of hand and eye, all the ardour, force, and gaiety of his own quick and lively spirit. The whole man is in the game, mind and body ; and his success is such as dexterity and enthusiasm united must always command. To be sure he is a *leetle* over eager, that I must confess, and does occasionally run out a slow mate ; but he is sure to make up for it by his own exertions, and after all what a delightful fault zeal is ! Now that we are on the subject of faults, it must be said, not that Joel has his share, which is of course, but that they are exceedingly venial, little shades that become him, and arise out of his brighter qualities as smoke from the flame. Thus, if he sometimes steals one of his active holidays for a revel or a cricket-match, he is sure to make up the loss to his master by a double portion of labour the next day ; and if now and then at tide-times he loiters in the chimney-corner of the Rose, rather longer than strict prudence might warrant, no one can hear his laugh and his song pouring through the open door, like the very voice of "jest and youthful jollity," without feeling certain that it is good fellowship, and not good liquor, that detains him. Indeed so much is he the delight of the country lads, who fre-

quent that well-accustomed inn, so much is his company sought after in all rustic junketings, that I am only astonished at the strength of resolution, and power of resisting temptation, which he displays in going thither so seldom.

If our village lads be so fond of him, it is not to be doubted but our village maidens like him too. The pretty brunette, Sally Wheeler, who left a good service at B., to take in needle-work, and come home to her grandmother, she being, to use Sally's phrase, "unked for want of company," (N. B. Dame Wheeler is as deaf as a post, a cannon would not rouse her), is thought, in our little world, to have had an eye to Joel in this excess of dutifulness. Miss Phœbe, the lass of the Rose, she also, before her late splendid marriage to the patten-maker, is said to have becurled and beflounced herself at least two tiers higher on club-nights, and Sundays, and holidays, and whenever there was a probable chance of meeting him. The gay recruiting serjeant, and all other beaux were abandoned the instant he appeared; nay, it is even hinted, that the patten-maker owes his fair bride partly to pique at Joel's indifference. Then Miss Sophia Matthews, the schoolmistress on the Lea, to whom in point of dignity Miss Phœbe was as nothing, who wears a muff and a veil, walks mincingly, and tosses her head in the air, keeps a maid,—a poor little drab

of ten years old ; follows, as she says, a genteel profession,—I think she may have twenty scholars at eight-pence a week ; and when she goes to dine with her brother, the collar-maker, hires a boy for a penny to carry her clogs ;—Miss Sophia, it is well known, hath pretermitted her dignity in the matter of Joel ; hath invited the whole family to tea, (only think of Joel at a tea-party !) hath spoken of him as “ a person above the common ; a respectable young man ; one, who with a discreet and accomplished wife, a woman of reading and education,” (Miss Sophia, in the days of her father, the late collar-maker of happy memory, before she “ taught the young idea how to shoot,” had herself drunk deeply at that well of knowledge, the circulating library of B.) “ not too young,” (Miss Sophia calls herself twenty-eight — I wonder what the register says !) “ no brazen-faced gipsey, like Sally Wheeler,” (Miss Sophia’s cast of countenance is altogether different from Sally’s dark and sparkling beauty, she being pink-eyed, red-haired, lean, pale and freckled) “ or the jill-flirt Phœbe”——but to cut short an oration which, in spite of the lady’s gentility, began to grow rather scurrilous, one fact was certain,—that Joel might, had he so chosen, have worn the crown matrimonial in Miss Sophia’s territories, consisting of a freehold-cottage, a little the worse for wear, a good garden, a capital orchard, and an exten-

sive right of common ; to say nothing of the fair damsel and her school, or, as she is accustomed to call it, her seminary.

Joel's proud bright eye glanced, however, carelessly over all. There was little perceptible difference of feeling in the gay distant smile, with which he regarded the coquettish advances of the pretty brunette, Sally Wheeler, or the respectful bow with which he retreated from the dignified condescension of Miss Sophia. He fluttered about our village belles like a butterfly over a bed of tulips ; sometimes approaching them for a moment, and seeming ready to fix, but oftener above and out of reach, a creature of a sprightlier element, too buoyant and volatile to light on an earthly flower. At last, however, the rover was caught ; and our damsel, Harriet, had the glory of winning that indomitable heart.

Now Harriet is in all things Lucy's successor ; in post, and favour, and beauty, and lovers. In my eye she is still prettier than Lucy ; there is something so feminine and so attractive in her loveliness. She is a tall young woman finely, though, for eighteen, rather fully formed ; with a sweet child-like face, a fair blooming complexion, a soft innocent smile, and the eye of a dove. Add to this a gentle voice, a quiet modest manner, and a natural gentility of appearance, and no wonder that Harriet might vie with her pre-

decessor in the number of her admirers. She inherited also a spice of her coquetry, although it was shewn in so different a way that we did not immediately find it out. Lucy was a flirt active ; Harriet was a flirt passive ; Lucy talked to her beaux ; Harriet only listened to her's ; Lucy, when challenged on the number of her conquests, denied the thing, and blushed, and laughed, and liked to be laughed at ; Harriet, on a similar charge, gave no token of liking or denial, but said quietly that she could not help it, and went on winning hearts by dozens, prodigal of smiles but chary of love, till Joel came, " pleased her by manners most unlike her own," and gave to her delicate womanly beauty the only charms it wanted—sensibility and consciousness.

The manner in which we discovered this new flirtation, which, unlike her others, was concealed with the pretty reserve and mystery that wait on true love, was sufficiently curious. We had noted Joel more frequently than common about the house : sometimes he came for Lizzy ; sometimes to bring news of a cricket-match ; sometimes to ask questions about bats and balls ; sometimes to see if his dog Ranger had followed my May ; sometimes to bring me a nosegay. All this occasioned no suspicion ; we were too glad to see Joel to think of enquiring why he came. But when the days shortened, and evening closed in dark

and cold before his work was done, and cricket and flowers were over, and May and Lizzy safe in their own warm beds, and poor Joel's excuses fairly at an end; then it was, that in the after-dinner pause about seven, when the clatter of plates and dishes was over, that the ornithological ear of the master of the house, a dabbler in natural history, was struck by a regular and melodious call, the note, as he averred, of a sky-lark. That a sky-lark should sing in front of our house, at seven o'clock, in a December evening, seemed, to say the least, rather startling. But our ornithologist happening to agree with Mr. White, of Selborne, in the opinion, that many more birds sing by night than is commonly supposed, and becoming more and more confident of the identity of the note, thought the thing possible; and not being able to discover any previous notice of the fact, had nearly inserted it, as an original observation, in the Naturalist's Calendar, when running out suddenly one moon-light night, to try for a peep at the nocturnal songster, he caught our friend Joel, whose accomplishments in this line we had never dreamt of, in the act of whistling a summons to his lady-love.

For some weeks our demure coquette listened to none but this bird-like wooing; partly from pride in the conquest; partly from real preference; and partly, I believe, from a lurking consciousness that Joel was

by no means a lover to be trifled with. Indeed he used to threaten, between jest and earnest, a ducking in the goose-pond opposite, to whoever should presume to approach his fair intended ; and the waters being high and muddy, and he at all points a formidable rival, most of her former admirers were content to stay away. At last, however, she relapsed into her old sin of listening. A neighbouring farmer gave a ball in his barn, to which both our lovers were invited and went. Now Harriet loves dancing, and Joel, though arrayed in a new jacket, and thin cricketing-pumps, would not dance ; he said he could not, but that, as Harriet observes, is incredible. I agree with her that the gentleman was too fine. He chose to stand and look on, and laugh, and make laugh, the whole evening. In the meantime his fair betrothed picked up a new partner, and a new beau, in the shape of a freshly-arrived carpenter, a grand martial-looking figure, as tall as a grenadier, who was recently engaged as foreman to our civil Wheeler, and who, even if he had heard of the denunciation, was of a size and spirit to set Joel and the goose-pond at defiance,—David might as well have attempted to goose-pond Goliath ! He danced the whole evening with his pretty partner, and afterwards saw her home ; all of which Joel bore with great philosophy. But the next night he came again ; and Joel approaching to give his own sky-lark signal,

was startled at seeing another lover leaning over the wicket, and his faithless mistress standing at the half-open door, listening to the tall carpenter, just as complacently as she was wont to do to himself. He passed on without speaking, turned down the little lane that leads to Dame Wheeler's cottage, and in less than two minutes Harriet heard the love-call sounded at Sally's gate. The effect was instantaneous; she discarded the tall carpenter at once and for ever, locked and bolted the door, and sate down to work or to cry in the kitchen. She did not cry long. The next night we again heard the note of the skylark-louder and more brilliant than ever, echoing across our court, and the lovers, the better friends for their little quarrel, have been as constant as turtle-doves ever since.

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

THE HARD SUMMER.

AUGUST 15th.—Cold, cloudy, windy, wet. Here we are, in the midst of the dog-days, clustering merrily round the warm hearth, like so many crickets, instead of chirruping in the green fields like that other merry insect the grasshopper ; shivering under the influence of the *Jupiter Pluvius* of England, the watery St. Swithin ; peering at that scarce personage the sun, when he happens to make his appearance, as intently as astronomers look after a comet, or the common people stare at a balloon ; exclaiming against the cold weather, just as we used to exclaim against the warm. “ What a change from last year ! ” is the first sentence you hear, go where you may. Every body remarks it, and every body complains of it ; and yet in my mind it has its advantages, or at least its compensations, as every thing in nature has, if we would only take the trouble to seek for them.

Last year, in spite of the love which we are now pleased to profess towards that ardent luminary, not one of the sun's numerous admirers had courage to look him in the face : there was no bearing the world till he had said " Good-night " to it. Then we might stir ; then we began to wake and to live. All day long we languished under his influence in a strange dreaminess, too hot to work, too hot to read, too hot to write, too hot even to talk ; sitting hour after hour in a green arbour, embowered in leafiness, letting thought and fancy float as they would. Those day-dreams were pretty things in their way ; there is no denying that. But then, if one half of the world were to dream through a whole summer, like the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, what would become of the other ?

The only office requiring the slightest exertion, which I performed in that warm weather, was watering my flowers. Common sympathy called for that labour. The poor things withered, and faded, and pined away ; they almost, so to say, panted for drought. Moreover, if I had not watered them myself, I suspect that no one else would ; for water last year was nearly as precious hereabout as wine. Our land-springs were dried up ; our wells were exhausted ; our deep ponds were dwindling into mud ; and geese, and ducks, and pigs, and laundresses, used to look with a jealous and suspicious eye on the few and

scanty half-buckets of that impure element, which my trusty lacquey was fain to filch for my poor geraniums and campanulas and tuberoses. We were forced to smuggle them in through my faithful adherent's territories, the stable, to avoid lectures within doors; and at last even that resource failed; my garden, my blooming garden, the joy of my eyes, was forced to go waterless like its neighbours, and became shrivelled, scorched, and sunburnt, like them. It really went to my heart to look at it.

On the other side of the house matters were still worse. What a dusty world it was when about sunset we became cool enough to creep into it! Flowers in the court looking fit for a *hortus siccus*; mummies of plants, dried as in an oven; hollyhocks, once pink, turned into Quakers; cloves smelling of dust. Oh dusty world! May herself looked of that complexion; so did Lizzy; so did all the houses, windows, chickens, children, trees, and pigs in the village; so above all did the shoes. No foot could make three plunges into that abyss of pulverised gravel, which had the impudence to call itself a hard road, without being clothed with a coat a quarter of an inch thick. Woe to white gowns! woe to black! Drab was your only wear.

Then, when we were out of the street, what a toil it was to mount the hill, climbing with weary steps and

slow upon the brown turf by the way-side, slippery, hot, and hard as a rock! And then if we happened to meet a carriage coming along the middle of the road,—the bottomless middle,—what a sandy whirlwind it was! What choking! what suffocation! No state could be more pitiable, except indeed that of the travellers who carried this misery about with them. I shall never forget the plight in which we met the coach one evening in last August, full an hour after its time, steeds and driver, carriage and passengers, all one dust. The outsides and the horses and the coachman, seemed reduced to a torpid quietness, the resignation of despair. They had left off trying to better their condition, and taken refuge in a wise and patient hopelessness, bent to endure in silence the extremity of ill. The six insides, on the contrary, were still fighting against their fate, vainly struggling to ameliorate their hapless destiny. They were visibly grumbling at the weather, scolding the dust, and heating themselves like a furnace by striving against the heat. How well I remember the fat gentleman without his coat, who was wiping his forehead, heaving up his wig, and certainly uttering that English ejaculation, which, to our national reproach, is the phrase of our language best known on the continent. And that poor boy, red-hot, all in a flame, whose mama, having divested her own person of all superfluous apparel, was trying

to relieve his sufferings by the removal of his neckerchief—an operation which he resisted with all his might. How perfectly I remember him, as well as the pale girl who sate opposite, fanning herself with her bonnet into an absolute fever! They vanished after a while in their own dust; but I have them all before my eyes at this moment, a companion-picture to Hogarth's *Afternoon*, a standing lesson to the grumblers at cold summers.

For my part, I really like this wet season. It keeps us within, to be sure, rather more than is quite agreeable; but then we are at least awake and alive there, and the world out of doors is so much the pleasanter when we can get abroad. Every thing does well, except those fastidious bipeds, men and women; corn ripens, grass grows, fruit is plentiful; there is no lack of birds to eat it, and there has not been such a wasp-season these dozen years. My garden wants no watering, and is more beautiful than ever, beating my old rival in that primitive art, the pretty wife of the little mason, out and out. Measured with mine, her flowers are nought. Look at those hollyhocks, like pyramids of roses; those garlands of the convolvulus major of all colours, hanging around that tall pole, like the wreathy hop-bine; those magnificent dusky cloves, breathing of the Spice Islands; those flaunting double dahlias; those splen-

did scarlet geraniums, and those fierce and warlike flowers the tiger-lilies. Oh how beautiful they are ! Besides, the weather clears sometimes—it has cleared this evening ; and here are we, after a merry walk up the hill, almost as quick as in the winter, bounding lightly along the bright green turf of the pleasant common, enticed by the gay shouts of a dozen clear young voices, to linger awhile, and see the boys play at cricket.

I plead guilty to a strong partiality towards that unpopular class of beings, country-boys : I have a large acquaintance amongst them, and I can almost say, that I know good of many and harm of none. In general they are an open, spirited, good-humoured race, with a proneness to embrace the pleasures and eschew the evils of their condition, a capacity for happiness, quite unmatched in man, or woman, or girl. They are patient, too, and bear their fate as scape-goats (for all sins whatsoever are laid as matters of course to their door, whether at home or abroad), with amazing resignation ; and, considering the many lies of which they are the objects, they tell wonderfully few in return. The worst that can be said of them is, that they seldom, when grown to man's estate, keep the promise of their boyhood ; but that is a fault to come—a fault that may not come, and ought not to be anticipated. It is astonishing how sensible they are to

notice from their betters, or those whom they think such. I do not speak of money, or gifts, or praise, or the more coarse and common briberies—they are more delicate courtiers; a word, a nod, a smile, or the mere calling of them by their names, is enough to insure their hearts and their services. Half-a-dozen of them, poor urchins, have run away now to bring us chairs from their several homes. “Thank you, Joe Kirby!—you are always first—yes, that is just the place.—I shall see every thing there. Have you been in yet, Joe?”—“No, ma’am! I go in next.”—“Ah, I am glad of that—and now’s the time. Really that was a pretty ball of Jem Eusden’s!—I was sure it would go to the wicket. Run, Joe! They are waiting for you.” There was small need to bid Joe Kirby make haste; I think he is, next to a race-horse, or a greyhound, or a deer, the fastest creature that runs—the most completely alert and active. Joe is mine especial friend, and leader of the “tender juveniles,” as Joel Brent is of the adults. In both instances this post of honour was gained by merit, even more remarkably so in Joe’s case than in Joel’s; for Joe is a less boy than many of his companions, (some of whom are fifteneers and sixteneers, quite as tall and nearly as old as Tom Coper) and a poorer than all, as may be conjectured from the lamentable state of that patched round frock, and the ragged condition of

those unpatched shoes, which would encumber, if any thing could, the light feet that wear them. But why should I lament the poverty that never troubles him? Joe is the merriest and happiest creature that ever lived twelve years in this wicked world. Care cannot come near him. He hath a perpetual smile on his round ruddy face, and a laugh in his hazel-eye, that drives the witch away. He works at yonder farm on the top of the hill, where he is in such repute for intelligence and good-humour, that he has the honour of performing all the errands of the house, of helping the maid, and the mistress, and the master, in addition to his own stated office of carter's boy. There he works hard from five till seven, and then he comes here to work still harder under the name of play—batting, bowling, and fielding, as if for life, filling the place of four boys; being, at a pinch, a whole eleven. The late Mr. Knyvett, the king's organist, who used in his own person to sing twenty parts at once of the hallelujah chorus, so that you would have thought he had a nest of nightingales in his throat, was but a type of Joe Kirby. There is a sort of ubiquity about him; he thinks nothing of being in two places at once, and for pitching a ball William Grey himself is nothing to him. It goes straight to the mark like a bullet. He is king of the cricketers from eight to sixteen, both inclusive, and an excellent ruler he makes. Never-

theless, in the best-ordered states there will be grumblers, and we have an opposition here in the shape of Jem Eusden.

Jem Eusden is a stunted lad of thirteen, or thereabout, lean, small, and short, yet strong and active. His face is of an extraordinary ugliness, colourless, withered, haggard, with a look of extreme age, much increased by hair so light that it might rather pass for white than flaxen. He is constantly arrayed in the blue cap and old-fashioned coat, the costume of an endowed school to which he belongs; where he sits still all day, and rushes into the field at night, fresh, untired, and ripe for action, to scold, and brawl, and storm, and bluster. He hates Joe Kirby, whose immoveable good-humour, broad smiles, and knowing nods, must certainly be very provoking to so fierce and turbulent a spirit; and he has himself (being, except by rare accident, no great player) the preposterous ambition of wishing to be manager of the sports. In short, he is a demagogue in embryo, with every quality necessary to a splendid success in that vocation,—a strong voice, a fluent utterance, an incessant iteration, and a frontless impudence. He is a great “scholar,” too, to use the country phrase; his “piece,” as our village-schoolmaster terms a fine sheet of flourishing writing, something between a valentine and a sampler, enclosed within a border of little

coloured prints—his last, I remember, was encircled by an engraved history of Moses, beginning at the finding in the bulrushes, with Pharaoh's daughter, dressed in a rose-coloured gown and blue feathers—his piece is not only the admiration of the school but of the parish, and is sent triumphantly around from house to house at Christmas, to extort halfpence and sixpences from all encouragers of learning—*Montem* in miniature. The Mosaic history was so successful, that the produce enabled Jem to purchase a bat and ball, which, besides adding to his natural arrogance (for the little pedant actually began to mutter against being eclipsed by a dunce, and went so far as to challenge Joe Kirby to a trial in Practice, or the Rule of Three), gave him, when compared with the general poverty, a most unnatural preponderance in the cricket state. He had the ways and means in his hands—(for, alas! the hard winter had made sad havoc among the bats, and the best ball was a bad one)—he had the ways and means, could withhold the supplies, and his party was beginning to wax strong, when Joe received a present of two bats and a ball for the youngsters in general, and himself in particular—and Jem's adherents left him on the spot—they ratted, to a man, that very evening. Notwithstanding this desertion, their forsaken leader has in nothing relaxed from his pretensions, or his ill-humour. He still quarrels and

brawls as if he had a faction to back him, and thinks nothing of contending with both sides, the ins and the outs, secure of out-talking the whole field. He has been squabbling these ten minutes, and is just marching off now with his own bat (he has never deigned to use one of Joe's) in his hand. What an ill-conditioned hobgoblin it is! And yet there is something bold and sturdy about him too. I should miss Jem Eusden.

Ah, there is another deserter from the party! my friend the little hussar—I do not know his name, and call him after his cap and jacket. He is a very remarkable person, about the age of eight years, the youngest piece of gravity and dignity I ever encountered; short, and square, and upright, and slow, with a fine bronzed flat visage, resembling those convertible signs the Broad-Face and the Saracen's Head, which, happening to be next-door neighbours in the town of B., I never know apart, resembling, indeed, any face that is open-eyed and immoveable—the very sign of a boy! He stalks about with his hands in his breeches pocket, like a piece of machinery; sits leisurely down when he ought to field, and never gets farther in batting than to stop the ball. His is the only voice never heard in the *mé-lée*; I doubt, indeed, if he have one, which may be partly the reason of a circumstance that I record to his honour, his fidelity to Jem Eusden, to whom he has adhered through every change of fortune with a tena-

city proceeding perhaps from an instinctive consciousness that that loquacious leader talks enough for two. He is the only thing resembling a follower that our demagogue possesses, and is cherished by him accordingly. Jem quarrels for him, scolds for him, pushes for him; and but for Joe Kirby's invincible good humour, and a just discrimination of the innocent from the guilty, the activity of Jem's friendship would get the poor hussar ten drubbings a day.

But it is growing late. The sun has set a long time. Only see what a gorgeous colouring has spread itself over those parting masses of clouds in the west,—what a train of rosy light! We shall have a fine sunshiny day to-morrow,—a blessing not to be undervalued, in spite of my late vituperation of heat. Shall we go home now? And shall we take the longest but prettiest road, that by the green lanes? This way, to the left, round the corner of the common, past Mrs. Welles's cottage, and our path lies straight before us. How snug and comfortable that cottage looks! Its little yard all alive with the cow, and the mare, and the colt almost as large as the mare, and the young foal, and the great yard-dog, all so fat! Fenced in with hay-rick, and wheat-rick, and bean-stack, and backed by the long garden, the spacious drying-ground, the fine orchard, and that large field quartered into four different crops. How comfortable this cottage looks, and how well the

owners earn their comforts! They are the most prosperous pair in the parish—she a laundress with twenty times more work than she can do, unrivalled in flounces and shirt-frills, and such delicacies of the craft; he, partly a farmer, partly a farmer's man, tilling his own ground, and then tilling other people's;—affording a proof, even in this declining age, when the circumstances of so many worthy members of the community seem to have “an alacrity in sinking,” that it is possible to amend them by sheer industry. He, who was born in the workhouse, and bred up as a parish boy, has now, by mere manual labour, risen to the rank of a land-owner, pays rates and taxes, grumbles at the times, and is called Master Welles,—the title next to Mister—that by which Shakspeare was called:—what would man have more? His wife, besides being the best laundress in the county, is a comely woman still. There she stands at the spring, dipping up water for tomorrow,—the clear, deep, silent spring, which sleeps so peacefully under its high flowery bank, red with the tall spiral stalks of the foxglove and their rich pendent bells, blue with the beautiful forget-me-not, that gem-like blossom, which looks like a living jewel of turquoise and topaz. It is almost too late to see its beauty; and here is the pleasant shady lane, where the high elms will shut out the little twilight that remains. Ah, but we shall have the fairies' lamps to

guide us, the stars of the earth, the glow-worms! Here they are, three almost together. Do you not see them? One seems tremulous, vibrating, as if on the extremity of a leaf of grass; the others are deeper in the hedge, in some green cell on which their light falls with an emerald lustre. I hope my friends the cricketers will not come this way home. I would not have the pretty creatures removed for more than I care to say, and in this matter I would hardly trust Joe Kirby—boys so love to stick them in their hats. But this lane is quite deserted. It is only a road from field to field. No one comes here at this hour. They are quite safe; and I shall walk here to-morrow and visit them again. And now, good-night! beautiful insects, lamps of the fairies, good-night!

THE TALKING GENTLEMAN.

THE lords of the creation, who are generally (to do them justice) tenacious enough of their distinctive and peculiar faculties and powers, have yet by common consent made over to the females the single gift of loquacity. Every man thinks and says that every woman talks more than he: it is the creed of the whole sex,—the debates and law reports notwithstanding. And every masculine eye that has scanned my title has already, I doubt not, looked to the *errata*, suspecting a mistake in the gender; but it is their misconception, not my mistake. I do not (Heaven forbid!) intend to impugn or abrogate our female privilege; I do not dispute that we do excel, generally speaking, in the use of the tongue; I only mean to assert that one gentleman does exist, (whom I have the pleasure of knowing intimately,) who stands pre-eminent and unrivalled in the art of talking,—unmatched and unapproached by man, woman, or child. Since the decease of my poor friend “the Talking Lady,” who dropped down speech-

less in the midst of a long story about nine weeks ago, and was immediately known to be dead by her silence, I should be at a loss where to seek a competitor to contend with him in a race of words, and I should be still more puzzled to find one that can match him in wit, pleasantry, or good-humour.

My friend is usually called Harry L., for, though a man of substance, a lord of land, a magistrate, a field officer of militia, nobody ever dreamed of calling him *Mister* or major, or by any such derogatory title—he is and will be all his life plain Harry, the name of universal good-will. He is indeed the pleasantest fellow that lives. His talk (one can hardly call it conversation, as that would seem to imply another interlocutor, something like reciprocity) is an incessant flow of good things, like Congreve's comedies without a replying speaker, or Joe Miller laid into one; and its perpetual stream is not lost and dispersed by diffusion, but runs in one constant channel, playing and sparkling like a fountain, the delight and ornament of our good town of B.

Harry L. is a perfect example of provincial reputation, of local fame. There is not an urchin in the town that has not heard of him, nor an old woman that does not chuckle by anticipation at his approach. The citizens of B. are as proud of him as the citizens of Antwerp were of the *Chapeau de Paille*, and they have

the advantage of the luckless Flemings in the certainty that their boast is not to be purchased. Harry, like the Flemish Beauty, is native to the spot; for he was born at B., educated at B., married at B.—though, as his beautiful wife brought him a good estate in a distant part of the country, there seemed at that epoch of his history some danger of his being lost to our ancient borough; but he is a social and gregarious animal; so he leaves his pretty place in Devonshire to take care of itself, and lives here in the midst of a hive. His tastes are not at all rural. He is no sportsman, no farmer, no lover of strong exercise. When at B., his walks are quite regular; from his own house, on one side of the town, to a gossip-shop called “literary” on the other, where he talks and reads newspapers, and others read newspapers and listen: thence he proceeds to another house of news, similar in kind, though differing in name, in an opposite quarter, where he and his hearers undergo the same process, and then he returns home, forming a pretty exact triangle of about half a mile. This is his daily exercise, or rather his daily walk; of exercise he takes abundance, not only in talking, (though that is nearly as good to open the chest as the dumb-bells,) but in a general restlessness and fidgetiness of person, the result of his ardent and nervous temperament, which can hardly endure repose of mind or body. He neither gives rest nor takes it. His

company is, indeed, in one sense (only one) fatiguing. Listening to him tires you like a journey. You laugh till you are forced to lie down. The medical gentlemen of the place are aware of this, and are accustomed to exhort delicate patients to abstain from Harry's society, just as they caution them against temptations in point of amusement or of diet—pleasant but dangerous. Choleric gentlemen should also avoid him, and such as love to have the last word; for, though never provoked himself, I cannot deny that he is occasionally tolerably provoking,—in politics especially—(and he is an ultra-liberal, quotes Cobbett, and goes rather too far)—in politics he loves to put his antagonist in a fume, and generally succeeds, though it is nearly the only subject on which he ever listens to an answer—chiefly I believe for the sake of a reply, which is commonly some trenchant repartee, that cuts off the poor answer's head like a razor. Very determined speakers would also do well to eschew his company—though in general I never met with any talker to whom other talkers were so ready to give way; perhaps because he keeps them in such cessant laughter, that they are not conscious of their silence. To himself the number of his listeners is altogether unimportant. His speech flows not from vanity or lust of praise, but from sheer necessity;—the reservoir is full, and runs over. When he has no one else to talk to, he can be content with his own company,

and talks to himself, being beyond a doubt greater in a soliloquy than any man off the stage. Where he is not known, this habit sometimes occasions considerable consternation and very ridiculous mistakes. He has been taken alternately for an actor, a poet, a man in love, and a man beside himself. Once in particular, at Windsor, he greatly alarmed a philanthropic sentinel by holding forth at his usual rate whilst pacing the terrace alone; and but for the opportune arrival of his party, and their assurances that it was only "the gentleman's way," there was some danger that the benevolent soldier might have been tempted to desert his post to take care of him. Even after this explanation, he looked with a doubtful eye at our friend, who was haranguing himself in great style, sighed and shook his head, and finally implored us to look well after him till he should be safe off the terrace.—"You see, Ma'am," observed the philanthropist in scarlet, "it is an awkward place for any body troubled with vagaries. Suppose the poor soul should take a fancy to jump over the wall!"

In his externals he is a well-looking gentleman of forty, or thereabout; rather thin and rather pale, but with no look of ill health, nor any other peculiarity, except the remarkable circumstance of the lashes of one eye being white, which gives a singular non-resemblance to his organs of vision. Every one perceives

the want of uniformity, and few detect the cause. Some suspect him of what farriers call a wall-eye; some think he squints. He himself talks familiarly of his two eyes, the black and the white, and used to liken them to those of our fine Persian cat, (now, alas! no more,) who had, in common with his feline countrymen, one eye blue as a sapphire, the other yellow as a topaz. The dissimilarity certainly rather spoils his beauty, but greatly improves his wit,—I mean the sense of his wit in others. It arrests attention, and predisposes to laughter; is an outward and visible sign of the comical. No common man has two such eyes. They are made for fun.

In his occupations and pleasures Harry is pretty much like other provincial gentlemen; loves a rubber, and jests all through at aces, kings, queens, and knaves, bad cards and good, at winning and losing, scolding and praise;—loves a play, at which he out-talks the actors whilst on the stage,—to say nothing of the advantage he has over them in the intervals between the acts;—loves music, as a good accompaniment to his grand solo;—loves a contested election above all. That is his real element,—that din and uproar and riot and confusion! To ride that whirlwind and direct that storm is his triumph of triumphs! He would make a great sensation in parliament himself, and a pleasant one. (By the way, he was once in danger of being

turned out of the gallery for setting all around him in a roar.) Think what a fine thing it would be for the members to have mirth introduced into the body of the house! to be sure of an honest, hearty, good-humoured laugh every night during the session! Besides, Harry is an admirable speaker, in every sense of the word. Jestings is indeed his forte, because he wills it so to be; and therefore, because he chooses to play jigs and country dances on a noble organ, even some of his staunchest admirers think he can play nothing else. There is no quality of which men so much grudge the reputation as versatility of talent. Because he is so humorous, they will hardly allow him to be eloquent; and, because he is so very witty, find it difficult to account him wise. But let him go where he has not that mischievous fame, or let him bridle his jests and rein in his humour only for one short hour, and he will pass for a most reverend orator,—logical, pathetic, and vigorous above all.—But how can I wish him to cease jesting even for an hour? Who would exchange the genial fame of good-humoured wit for the stern reputation of wisdom? Who would choose to be Socrates, if with a wish he could be Harry L.?

MRS. MOSSE.

I do not know whether I ever hinted to the courteous reader that I had been in my younger days, without prejudice to my present condition, somewhat of a spoiled child. The person who, next after my father and mother, contributed most materially to this melancholy catastrophe, was an old female domestic, Mrs. Elizabeth Mosse, who, at the time of her death, had lived nearly sixty years in our house and that of my maternal grandfather. Of course, during the latter part of this long period, the common forms and feelings of servant and master were entirely swept away. She was a member of the family, an humble friend—happy are they who have such a friend!—living as she liked up-stairs or down, in the kitchen or the nursery, considered, consulted, and beloved by the whole household.

Mossy (for by that fondling nursery name she best liked to be called) had never been married, so that the

family of her master and mistress had no rival in her heart, and on me, their only child, was concentrated that intensity of affection which distinguishes the attachments of age. I loved her dearly too, as dearly as a spoiled child can love its prime spoiler,—but, oh! how selfish was my love, compared to the depth, the purity, the indulgence, the self-denial of hers! Dear Mossy! I shall never do her justice; and yet I must try.

Mrs. Mosse, in her appearance, was in the highest degree what is called respectable. She must have been tall when young; for even when bent with age, she was above the middle height, a large-made though meagre woman. She walked with feebleness and difficulty, from the attacks of hereditary gout, which not even her temperance and activity could ward off. There was something very interesting in this tottering helplessness, clinging to the balusters, or holding by doors and chairs like a child. It had nothing of vulgar lameness; it told of age, venerable age. Out of doors she seldom ventured, unless on some very sunny afternoon I could entice her into the air, and then once round the garden, or to the lawn gate and back again, was the extent of her walk, propped by a very aristocratic walking-stick (once the property of a duchess) as tall as herself, with a hooked ivory handle, joined to the cane by a rim of gold. Her face was as venerable

as her person. She must have been very handsome ; indeed she was so still, as far as regular and delicate features, a pale brown complexion, dark eyes still retaining the intelligence and animation of youth, and an expression perfectly gentle and feminine, could make her so. It is one of the worst penalties that woman pays to age, that often, when advanced in life, the face loses its characteristic softness ; in short, but for the difference in dress, many an old woman's head might pass for that of an old man. This misfortune could never have happened to Mossy. No one could mistake the sex of that sweet countenance.

Her dress manifested a good deal of laudable coquetry, a nice and minute attention to the becoming. I do not know at what precise date her costume was fixed ; but, as long as I remember her, fixed it was, and stood as invariably at one point of fashion, as the hand of an unwound clock stands at one hour of the day. It consisted (to begin from the feet and describe upwards) of black shoes of shining stuff, with very pointed toes, high heels, and a peak up the instep, showing to advantage her delicately white cotton stockings, and peeping beneath petticoats so numerous and substantial, as to give a rotundity and projection almost equal to a hoop. Her exterior garment was always quilted, varying according to the season or the occasion from simple stuff, or fine white dimity, or an obsolete

manufacture called Marseilles, up to silk and satin ;— for, as the wardrobes of my three grandmothers (pshaw ! I mean my grandfather's three wives !) had fallen to her lot, few gentlewomen of the last century could boast a greater variety of silks that stood on end. Over the quilted petticoat came an open gown, whose long waist reached to the bottom of her stiff stays, and whose very full tail, about six inches longer than the petticoat, would have formed a very inconvenient little train, if it had been permitted to hang down ; but that inconvenience never happened, and could scarcely have been contemplated by the designer. The tail was constantly looped up, so as to hang behind in a sort of bunchy festoon, exhibiting on each side the aforesaid petticoat. In material the gown also varied with the occasion, although it was always either composed of dark cotton or of the rich silks and satins of my grandmama's wardrobe. The sleeves came down just below the elbow, and were finished by a narrow white ruffle meeting her neat mittens. On her neck she wore a snow-white double muslin kerchief, pinned over the gown in front, and confined by an apron also of muslin ; and, over all, a handsome silk shawl, so pinned back as to show a part of the snowy neck-kerchief. Her head-dress was equally becoming, and more particularly precise ; for, if ever she betrayed an atom of old-maidishness, it was on the score of her caps. From

a touch of the gout in her hands, which had enlarged and stiffened the joints, she could do no work which required nicety, and the successive lady's maids, on whom the operation devolved, used to say that they would rather make up ten caps for their mistress than one for Mrs. Mosse; and yet the construction seemed simple enough. A fine plain clear-starched caul, sticking up rather high and peaked in front, was plaited on a Scotch gauze headpiece; (I remember there used to be exactly six plaits on each side—woe to the damsel who should put more or less!) and, on the other side, a border, consisting of a strip of fine muslin, edged with narrow lace, clear-starched and crimped, was plaited on with equal precision. In one part of this millinery I used to assist. I dearly loved to crimp Mossy's frills, and she with her usual indulgence used frequently to let me, keeping however a pretty close eye on her laces and muslins, whilst I was passing them with triumphant rapidity between the small wooden machine notched longitudinally, and the corresponding roller. Perhaps a greater proof of indulgence could hardly have been shown, since she must, during this operation, have been in double fear for her own cap strips, which did occasionally get a rent, and for my fingers, which were sometimes well pinched—then she would threaten that I should never crimp her muslin again—a *never* which seldom lasted beyond the next

cap-making. The head-piece was then concealed by a satin riband fastened in a peculiar bow, something between a bow and a puffing behind, whilst the front was adorned with an equally peculiar small knot, of which the two bows were pinned down flat and the two ends left sticking up, cut into scallops of a prodigious regularity. The purchase of the ribands formed another branch of the cap-making department to which I laid claim. From the earliest period at which I could distinguish one colour from another, I had been purveyor of ribands to Mossy, and indeed at all fairs, or whenever I received a present or entered a shop, (and I was so liberally supplied that there was nothing like generosity in the case,) it was the first and pleasantest destination of money that occurred to me;—so that the dear woman used to complain, that Miss bought her so many ribands, that they spoiled in keeping. We did not quite agree either in our taste. White, as both acknowledged, was the only wear for Sundays and holidays; but then she loved plain white, and I could not always control a certain wandering inclination for figured patterns and pearl edges. If Mossy had an aversion to any thing, it was to a pearl edge. I never could persuade her to wear that simple piece of finery but once; and then she made as many wry faces as a child eating olives, and stood before a glass eyeing the obnoxious riband with so much discomposure, that I

was fain to take it out myself, and promise to buy no more pearl edges. The every-day ribands were coloured; and there, too, we had our little differences of taste and opinion. Both agreed in the propriety of grave colours; but then my reading of a grave colour was not always the same with hers. My eyes were not old enough. She used to accuse my French greys of blueness, and my crimsons of redness, and my greens of their greenness. She had a *penchant* for brown, and to brown I had a repugnance only to be equalled by that which she professed towards a pearl edge;—indeed I retain my dislike to this hour;—it is such an exceedingly cross and frumpish-looking colour—and then its ugliness! Show me a brown flower! No; I could not bring myself to buy brown;—so after fighting many battles about grey and green, we at last settled on purple as a sort of neutral tint, a hue which pleased both parties. To return to the cap which we have been so long making—the finish both to that and to my description was a strip of crimped muslin, with edging on both sides to match the border, quilled on a piece of tape, and fastened to the cap at each ear. This she called the *chinnum*. A straight short row of hair rather grey, but still very dark for her age, just appeared under the plaited lace; and a pair of silver-mounted spectacles completed her equipment. If I live to the age of seventy, I will dress so too, with an exception

of the stiff stays. Only a waist native to the fashion could endure that whalebone armour.

Her employments were many and various. No work was required of her from her mistress; but idleness was misery to her habits of active usefulness, and it was astonishing how much those crippled fingers could do. She preferred coarse needle-work, as it was least difficult to her eyes and hands; and she attended also to those numerous and undefined avocations of a gentleman's family which come under the denomination of odd jobs—shelling peas, paring apples, splitting French beans, washing china, darning stockings, hemming and mending dusters and house-cloths, making cabbage-nets, and knitting garters. These were her daily avocations, the amusements which she loved. The only more delicate operation of needle-work that she ever undertook was the making of pincushions, a manufacture in which she delighted—not the quips and quiddities of these degenerate days, little bits of riband, and pasteboard, and gilt paper, in the shape of books or butterflies, by which, at charitable repositories, half-a-dozen pins are smuggled into a lady's pocket, and shillings and half-crowns are smuggled out;—no! Mossy's were real solid old-fashioned silken pincushions, such as Autolyceus might have carried about amongst his pedlery-ware, square and roomy, and capable, at a moderate

computation, of containing a whole paper of *short-whites*, and another of *middlings*. It was delightful to observe her enjoyment of this play-work; the conscious importance with which she produced her satins and brocades, and her cards of sewing silk (she generally made a whole batch at once)—the deliberation with which she assorted the colours;—the care with which she tacked and fitted side to side, and corner to corner;—the earnestness with which, when all was sewed up except one small aperture for the insertion of the stuffing, she would pour in the bran, or stow in the wool;—then the care with which she poked the stuffing into every separate corner, ramming it down with all her strength, and making the little bag (so to say) hold more than it would hold, until it became almost as hard as a cricket-ball;—then how she drew the aperture together by main force, putting so many last stitches, fastening off with such care;—and then distributing them to all around her (for her lady-like spirit would have scorned the idea of selling them), and always reserving the gayest and the prettiest for me. Dear old soul! I have several of them still.

But, if I should begin to enumerate all the instances of kindness which I experienced at her hands, through the changes and varieties of troublesome childhood and fantastic youth; from the time when I was a puling baby, to the still more exacting state of a young

girl at home in the holidays, I should never know when to end. Her sweet and loving temper was self-rewarded. She enjoyed the happiness she gave. Those were pleasant evenings when my father and mother were engaged in the Christmas-dinner visits of a gay and extensive neighbourhood, and Mrs. Mosse used to put on her handsomest shawl and her kindest smile, and totter up stairs to drink tea with me, and keep me company. From those evenings I imbibed, in the first place, a love of strong green tea, for which gentlewomanly excitation Mossy had a remarkable predilection; secondly, a very discreditable and unlady-like partiality, of which I am quite ashamed, which I keep a secret from my most intimate friends, and would not mention for the world—a sort of sneaking kindness for her favourite game of cribbage; an old-fashioned vulgarity, which, in my mind, beats the genteeler pastimes of whist and picquet, and every game, except quadrille, out and out. I make no exception in favour of chess, because, thanks to my stupidity, I never could learn that recondite diversion; moreover, judging from the grave faces and fatiguing silence of the initiated, I cannot help suspecting that, board for board, we cribbage-players are as well amused as they. Dear Mossy could neither feel to deal and shuffle, nor see to peg; so that the greater part of the business fell to my share. The

success was pretty equally divided. Three rubbers were our stint ; and we were often game and game in the last before victory declared itself. She was very anxious to beat, certainly—(N. B. we never played for any thing)—she liked to win ; and yet she did not quite like that I should lose. If we could both have won—if it had been four-handed cribbage, and she my partner—still there would have been somebody to be beaten and pitied, but then that somebody would not have been “ Miss.”

The cribbage hour was pleasant ; but I think the hours of chat which preceded and followed it were pleasanter still. Mossy was a most agreeable companion, sensible, modest, simple, shrewd, with an exactness of recollection, an honesty of memory, that gave exceeding interest to her stories. You were sure that you heard the truth. There was one striking peculiarity in her manner of talking, or rather one striking contrast. The voice and accent were quite those of a gentlewoman, as sweet-toned and correct as could be ; the words and their arrangement were altogether those of a common person, provincial and ungrammatical in every phrase and combination. I believe it is an effect of association, from the little slips in her grammar, that I have contracted a most un-scholar-like prejudice in favour of false syntax, which is so connected in my mind with right notions, that I

no sooner catch the sound of bad English than I begin to listen for good sense ; and really they often go together (always supposing that the bad English be not of the order called slang), they meet much more frequently than those exclusive people, ladies and gentlemen, are willing to allow. In her they were always united. But the charm of her conversation was in the old family stories, and the unconscious peeps at old manners which they afforded.

My grandfather, with whom she had lived in his first wife's time, full twenty years before my mother's birth, was a most respectable clergyman, who, after passing a few years in London amongst the wits and poets of the day, seeing the star of Pope in its decline, and that of Johnson in its rise, had retired into the country, where he held two adjoining livings of considerable value, both of which he served for above forty years, until the duty becoming too severe, he resigned one of them under an old-fashioned notion, that he who did the duty ought to receive the remuneration. I am very proud of my venerable ancestor. We have a portrait of him taken shortly after he was ordained, in his gown and band, with a curious flowing wig, something like that of a judge, fashionable doubtless, at the time, but which at present rather discomposes one's notions of clerical costume. He seems to have been a dark little man, with a sensible counte-

nance, and a pair of black eyes, that even in the picture look you through. He was a votary of the Muses, too; a contributor to Lewis's Miscellany; (did my readers ever hear of that collection?) translated Horace, as all gentlemen do; and wrote love-verses, which had the unusual good fortune of obtaining their object, being, as Mrs. Mosse was wont to affirm, the chief engine and implement by which at fifty he gained the heart of his third wife, my real grandmama, the beautiful daughter of a neighbouring 'squire. Of Dr. R., his wives, and his sermons, the bishops who visited, and the poets who wrote to him, Mossy's talk was mainly composed; chiefly of the wives.

Mrs. R., the first, was a fine London lady, a widow, and considerably older than her spouse, inasmuch as my grand-papa's passion for her commenced when he and her son, by a former husband, were school-fellows at Westminster. Mrs. Mosse never talked much of her, and, I suspect, did not much like her, though, when closely questioned, she would say that madam was a fine, portly lady, stately and personable, but rather too high. Her son made a sad *mesalliance*. He ran away with the sexton's daughter, an adventure which cost the sexton his post, and his mother her pride: she never looked up after it. That disgrace, and a cold caught by bumping on a pillion six miles through the rain, sent her to her grave.

Of the second Mrs. R. little remains on record, except a gown and petticoat of primrose silk, curiously embossed and embroidered with gold and silver thread and silks of all colours, in an enormous running pattern of staring flowers, wonderfully unlike nature; also various recipes in the family receipt-book, which show a delicate Italian hand, and a bold originality of orthography. The chief event of her married life appears to have been the small-pox. She and two of her sisters, and Mrs. Mosse, were all inoculated together. The other servants, who had not gone through the disorder, were sent out of the house: Dr. R. himself took refuge with a neighbouring friend, and the patients were consigned to the care of two or three nurses, gossips by profession, hired from the next town. The best parlour (in those days drawing-rooms were not) was turned into a hospital; a quarantine, almost as strict as would be required in the plague, was kept up, and the preparation, the disease, and the recovery, consumed nearly two months. Mrs. Mosse always spoke of it as one of the pleasantest passages of her life. None of them suffered much; there was nothing to do; plenty of gossiping; a sense of self-importance, such as all prisoners must feel more or less; and for amusement they had Pamela, the Spectator, and Sir Charles Grandison. My grandfather had a very fine library; but Sir Charles was a female

book, having been purchased by the joint contributions of six young ladies, and circulated amongst them once a year, sojourning two months with each fair partner, till death or marriage broke up the *coterie*. Is not that fame?—Well, the second Mrs. R. died in the course of time, though not of the small-pox; and my grandfather, faithful to his wives, but not to their memories, married again as usual.

His third adventure in that line was particularly happy; for my grandmother, beside being a celebrated beauty, appears to have been one of the best and kindest women that ever gladdened a country-home. She had a large household; for the tithes of one rich rectory were taken in kind, and the glebe cultivated; so that the cares of a farm-house were added to the hospitality of a man of good fortune, and to the sort of stateliness which in those primitive days appertained to a doctor of divinity. The superintendence of that large household seems to have been at once her duty and her delight. It was a plenty and festivity almost resembling that of Camacho's wedding, guided by a wise and liberal oeconomy, and a spirit of indefatigable industry. Oh the saltings, the picklings, the preservings, the cake-makings, the unnamed and unnameable confectionary doings over which she presided! The very titles of her territories denoted the extent of her stores. The

apple-room, the pear-bin, the cheese-loft, the minced-meat closet, were household words as familiar in Mossy's mouth as the dairy or the poultry-yard. And my grandmama was no hoarder for hoarding's sake, no maker of good things which were not to be eaten—as I have sometimes noted amongst your managing ladies; the object of her cares and stores was to contribute to the comfort of all who came within her influence. The large parsonage-house was generally overflowing with guests; and from the Oxford professor, who, with his wife, children, servants, and horses, passed his vacations there, to the poor pew-opener, who came with her little ones at tide-times, all felt the charm of her smiling graciousness, her sweet and cheerful spirit, her open hand and open heart. It is difficult to imagine a happier couple than my venerable grandfather and his charming wife. He retained to the last his studious habits, his love of literature, and his strong and warm family affections; while she cast the sunshine of her innocent gaiety over his respectable age, proud of his scholarship, and prouder still of his virtues. Both died long ago. But Mossy was an "honest chronicler," and never weary of her theme. Even the daily airings of the good doctor (who, in spite of his three wives, had a little of the peculiar preciseness in his studies and his

exercise, which one is apt to attribute exclusively to that dreary person, an old bachelor), even those airings from twelve to two, four miles on the turnpike-road and four miles back, with the fat horses and the grey-haired coachman, became vivid and characteristic in her description. The very carriage-dog, Sancho, was individualized; we felt that he belonged to the people and the time.

Of these things we talked, mingled with many miscellaneous anecdotes of the same date;—how an electioneering duke saluted madam, and lost master's interest by the freedom; how Sir Thomas S., the Lovelace of his day, came in his chariot and six, full twenty miles out of his way, to show himself to Miss Fanny in a Spanish masquerade-dress, white satin slashed with blue, a blue cloke embroidered with silver, and point-lace that might have won any woman's heart, except that of his fair but obdurate mistress; and lastly, how Henry Fielding, when on a visit in the neighbourhood, had been accustomed to come and swing the children in the great barn; he had even swung Mossy herself, to her no small edification and delight—only think of being chucked backwards and forwards by the man who wrote about Parson Adams and 'Squire Allworthy! I used to envy her that felicity. Then from authors we got to books. She could not see in my time to read any thing but the folio Bible, and Com-

mon Prayer-Book, with which my dear mother had furnished her ; but in her younger days she had seen or heard parts at least of a variety of books, and entered into them with a very keen though uncritical relish. Her chief favourites were, the Pilgrim's Progress, Don Quixote, Gulliver's Travels, Robinson Crusoe, and the equally apocryphal but still truer-seeming History of the Plague in London, by the same author, all of which she believed with the most earnest simplicity. I used frequently to read to her the passages she liked best ; and she in her turn would repeat to me songs and ballads, good, bad, and indifferent — a strange medley, and strangely confounded in her memory ; and so the time passed till ten o'clock. Those were pleasant evenings for her and for me.

I have sometimes, on recollection, feared that her down-stair life was less happy. All that the orders of a mistress could effect for her comfort was done. But we were rich then unluckily ; and there were skip-jacks of footmen, and surly coachmen, and affected waiting-maids, and vixenish cooks, with tempers red-hot like their coals, to vex and tease our dear old woman. She must have suffered greatly between her ardent zeal for her master's interest, and that strange principle of concealing evil doings which servants call honour, and of which she was perpetually the slave

and the victim. She had another infirmity, too, an impossibility of saying no, which, added to an unbounded generosity of temper, rendered her the easy dupe of the artful and designing. She would give any thing to the appearance of want, or the pretence of affection; in short, to importunity, however clothed. It was the only point of weakness in her character; and to watch that she did not throw away her own little comforts, to protect her from the effects of her over-liberality, was the chief care of her mistress. Three inferior servants were successively turned away for trespassing on Mossy's goodness, drinking her green tea, eating her diet-bread, begging her gowns. But the evil was incurable; she could dispense with any pleasure, except that of giving. So she lived on, beloved as the kind, the gentle, and the generous must be, till I left school—an event that gave her great satisfaction.

We passed the succeeding spring in London; and she took the opportunity to pay a long-promised visit to a half-nephew and niece, or rather a half-niece and her husband, who lived in Prince's-street, Barbican. Mrs. Beck (one naturally mentions her first as the person of most consequence) was the only real woman who ever came up to the magnificent abstract idea of the "fat woman of Brentford," the only being for whom Sir John Falstaff might have passed undetected.

She was indeed a mountain of flesh, exuberant, rubicund, and bearded like a man; and she spoke, in a loud deep mannish voice, a broad Wiltshire dialect; but she was hearty and jovial withal, a thorough good-fellow in petticoats. Mr. Beck, on the other hand, was a little, insignificant, perking, sharp-featured man, with a Jerry-Sneak expression in his pale whey-face, a thin squeaking voice, and a Cockney accent. He had been lucky enough to keep a little shop in an independant borough, at the time of a violent contested election; and having adroitly kept back his vote till votes rose to their full value (I hope this is no breach of privilege), and then voted on the stronger side, he was at the time of which I speak comfortably settled in the excise as a tide-waiter, had a pretty neat house, brought up his family in good repute, wore a flaming red waistcoat, attended a dissenting meeting, and owed no man a shilling.

These good people were very fond of their aunt, who had indeed, before they were so well off, shown them innumerable kindnesses. Perhaps there might be in the case a little gratitude for favours to come; for she had three or four hundred pounds to bequeath, partly her own savings, and partly a legacy from a distant relative; and they were her natural heirs. However that might be, they paid her all possible attention, and when we were about to return into the

country, petitioned so vehemently for a few weeks more, that, yielding to the above-mentioned infirmity, she consented to stay. I had myself been the ambassadress to Barbican to fetch our dear old friend ; and I remember, as if it were yesterday, how earnestly I entreated her to come with me, and how seriously I lectured Mrs. Beck for her selfishness, in wishing to keep her aunt in London during the heat of June. I even, after taking leave, sprang out of the carriage, and ran again up stairs to persuade her to come with me. Mossy's wishes were evidently on my side ; but she had promised, and the performance of her promise was peremptorily claimed : so with a heavy heart I left her. I never saw her again. There is surely such a thing as presentiment. A violent attack of gout in the stomach carried her off in a few hours. Hail to thy memory ! for thou wast of the antique world, when " service sweat for duty, not for meed !"

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

NUTTING.

SEPTEMBER 26th.—One of those delicious autumnal days, when the air, the sky, and the earth, seem lulled into an universal calm, softer and milder even than May. We sallied forth for a walk, in a mood congenial to the weather and the season, avoiding, by mutual consent, the bright and sunny common, and the gay high road, and stealing through shady unfrequented lanes, where we were not likely to meet any one,—not even the pretty family procession which in other years we used to contemplate with so much interest—the father, mother, and children, returning from the wheat-field, the little ones laden with bristling close-tied bunches of wheat-ears, their own gleanings, or a bottle and a basket which had contained their frugal dinner, whilst the mother would carry her babe hushing and lulling it, and the father and an elder child trudged after with the cradle, all seeming

wearily, and all happy. We shall not see such a procession as this to-day; for the harvest is nearly over, the fields are deserted, the silence may almost be felt. Except the wintry notes of the red-breast, nature herself is mute. But how beautiful, how gentle, how harmonious, how rich! The rain has preserved to the herbage all the freshness and verdure of spring, and the world of leaves has lost nothing of its midsummer brightness, and the hare-bell is on the banks and the woodbine in the hedges, and the low furze, which the lambs cropped in the spring, has burst again into its golden blossoms.

All is beautiful that the eye can see; perhaps the more beautiful for being shut in with a forest-like closeness. We have no prospect in this labyrinth of lanes, cross-roads, mere cart-ways, leading to the innumerable little farms into which this part of the parish is divided. Uphill or down, these quiet woody lanes scarcely give us a peep at the world, except when, leaning over a gate, we look into one of the small enclosures, hemmed in with hedgerows, so closely set with growing timber, that the meadowy opening looks almost like a glade in a wood, or when some cottage, planted at a corner of one of the little greens formed by the meeting of these cross-ways, almost startles us by the unexpected sight of the dwellings of men in such a solitude. But that we have more of hill and

dale, and that our cross-roads are excellent in their kind, this side of our parish would resemble the description given of La Vendée, in Madame Laroche-jacquelin's most interesting book*. I am sure if wood can entitle a country to be called Le Bocage, none can have a better right to the name. Even this pretty snug farm-house on the hill side, with its front covered with the rich vine, which goes wreathing up to the very top of the clustered chimney, and its sloping orchard full of fruit—even this pretty quiet nest can hardly peep out of its leaves. Ah! they are gathering in the orchard-harvest. Look at that young rogue in the old mossy apple-tree—that great tree, bending with the weight of its golden-rennets—see how he pelts his little sister beneath with apples as red and as round as her own cheeks, while she, with her outstretched frock, is trying to catch them, and laughing and offering to pelt again as often as one bobs against her; and look at that still younger imp, who, as grave as a judge, is creeping on hands and knees under the tree, picking up the apples as they fall so

* An almost equally interesting account of that very peculiar and interesting scenery, may be found in "The Maid of La Vendée," an English novel, remarkable for its simplicity and truth of painting, written by Mrs. Le Noir, the daughter of Christopher Smart, and inheritrix of much of his talent. Her works deserve to be better known.

deedily *, and depositing them so honestly in the great basket on the grass, already fixed so firmly and opened so widely, and filled almost to overflowing by the brown rough fruitage of the golden rennet's next neighbour the russeting; and see that smallest urchin of all, seated apart in infantine state on the turfy bank, with that toothsome piece of deformity a crumpling in each hand, now biting from one sweet hard juicy morsel, and now from another. — Is not that a pretty English picture? And then, farther up the orchard, that bold hardy lad, the eldest-born, who has scaled (Heaven knows how!) the tall straight upper branch of that great pear-tree, and is sitting there as securely and as fearlessly, in as much real safety and apparent danger, as a sailor on the top-mast. Now he shakes the tree with a mighty swing that brings down a pelting shower of stony bergamots, which the father gathers rapidly up, whilst the mother can hardly assist for her motherly fear,—a fear which only spurs the spirited boy to bolder ventures. Is not that a pretty picture? And they are such a handsome family, too,

* “Deedily,” — I am not quite sure that this word is good English; but it is genuine Hampshire, and is used by the most correct of female writers, Miss Austen. It means (and it is no small merit that it has no exact synonyme) any thing done with a profound and plodding attention, an action which engrosses all the powers of mind and body.

the Brookers. I do not know that there is any gipsey blood, but there is the true gipsey complexion, richly brown, with cheeks and lips so deeply red, black hair curling close to their heads in short crisp rings, white shining teeth—and such eyes!—That sort of beauty entirely eclipses your mere roses and lilies. Even Lizzy, the prettiest of fair children, would look poor and watery by the side of Willy Brooker, the sober little personage who is picking up the apples with his small chubby hands, and filling the basket so orderly, next to his father the most useful man in the field. “Willy!” He hears without seeing; for we are quite hidden by the high bank, and a spreading hawthorn-bush that overtops it, though between the lower branches and the grass we have found a convenient peep-hole. “Willy!” The voice sounds to him like some fairy dream, and the black eyes are raised from the ground with sudden wonder, the long silky eye-lashes thrown back till they rest on the delicate brow, and a deeper blush is burning in those dark cheeks, and a smile is dimpling about those scarlet lips. But the voice is silent now, and the little quiet boy, after a moment’s pause, is gone coolly to work again. He is indeed a most lovely child. I think some day or other he must marry Lizzy; I shall propose the match to their respective mamas. At present the parties are rather too young for a wedding—the

intended bridegroom being, as I should judge, six, or thereabout, and the fair bride barely five,—but at least we might have a betrothment after the royal fashion,—there could be no harm in that. Miss Lizzy, I have no doubt, would be as demure and coquettish as if ten winters more had gone over her head, and poor Willy would open his innocent black eyes, and wonder what was going forward. They would be the very Oberon and Titania of the village, the fairy king and queen.

Ah! here is the hedge along which the periwinkle wreathes and twines so profusely, with its ever-green leaves shining like the myrtle, and its starry blue flowers. It is seldom found wild in this part of England; but, when we do meet with it, it is so abundant and so welcome,—the very robin-redbreast of flowers, a winter friend. Unless in those unfrequent frosts which destroy all vegetation, it blossoms from September to June, surviving the last lingering crane's bill, forerunning the earliest primrose, hardier even than the mountain daisy,—peeping out from beneath the snow, looking at itself in the ice, smiling through the tempests of life, and yet welcoming and enjoying the sunbeams. Oh, to be like that flower!

The little spring that has been bubbling under the hedge all along the hill-side begins, now that we have mounted the eminence and are imperceptibly descending, to deviate into a capricious variety of clear deep

pools and channels, so narrow and so choked with weeds, that a child might overstep them. The hedge has also changed its character. It is no longer the close compact vegetable wall of hawthorn, and maple, and briar roses, intertwined with bramble and woodbine, and crowned with large elms or thickly set saplings. No! the pretty meadow which rises high above us, backed and almost surrounded by a tall coppice, needs no defence on our side but its own steep bank, garnished with tufts of broom, with pollard oaks wreathed with ivy, and here and there with long patches of hazel overhanging the water. "Ah there are still nuts on that bough!" and in an instant my dear companion, active and eager and delighted as a boy, has hooked down with his walking-stick one of the lissome hazel stalks, and cleared it of its tawny clusters, and in another moment he has mounted the bank, and is in the midst of the nuttery, now transferring the spoil from the lower branches into that vast variety of pockets which gentlemen carry about them, now bending the tall tops into the lane, holding them down by main force, so that I might reach them and enjoy the pleasure of collecting some of the plunder myself. A very great pleasure he knew it would be. I doffed my shawl, tucked up my flounces, turned my straw bonnet into a basket, and began gathering and scrambling—for, manage it how you may, nutting is scrambling work,—those boughs,

however tightly you may grasp them by the young fragrant twigs and the bright green leaves, will recoil and burst away; but there is a pleasure even in that; so on we go, scrambling and gathering with all our might and all our glee. Oh what an enjoyment! All my life long I have had a passion for that sort of seeking which implies finding, (the secret, I believe, of the love of field-sports, which is in man's mind a natural impulse,)—therefore I love violeting,—therefore, when we had a fine garden I used to love to gather strawberries, and cut asparagus, and, above all, to collect the filberts from the shrubberies: but this hedge-row nutting beats that sport all to nothing. That was a make-believe thing, compared with this; there was no surprise, no suspense, no unexpectedness—it was as inferior to this wild nutting, as the turning out of a bag-fox is to unearthing the fellow in the eyes of a staunch fox-hunter.

Oh what an enjoyment this nut-gathering is! They are in such abundance, that it seems as if there were not a boy in the parish, nor a young man, nor a young woman,—for a basket of nuts is the universal tribute of country gallantry; our pretty damsel Harriet has had at least half a dozen this season; but no one has found out these. And they are so full too, we lose half of them from over-ripeness; they drop from the socket at the slightest motion. If we lose, there is one who

finds. May is as fond of nuts as a squirrel, and cracks the shell and extracts the kernel with equal dexterity. Her white glossy head is upturned now to watch them as they fall. See how her neck is thrown back like that of a swan, and how beautifully her folded ears quiver with expectation, and how her quick eye follows the rustling noise, and her light feet dance and pat the ground, and leap up with eagerness, seeming almost sustained in the air, just as I have seen her when Brush is beating a hedgerow, and she knows from his questing that there is a hare afoot. See, she has caught that nut just before it touched the water; but the water would have been no defence,—she fishes them from the bottom, she delves after them amongst the matted grass—even my bonnet—how beggingly she looks at that! “Oh what a pleasure nutting is!—Is it not, May? But the pockets are almost full, and so is the basket-bonnet, and that bright watch the sun says it is late;—and after all it is wrong to rob the poor boys—‘pleasant but wrong’—is it not, May?”—May shakes her graceful head denyingly, as if she understood the question—“And we must go home now—must we not? But we will come nutting again some time or other—shall we not, my May?”

AUNT MARTHA.

ONE of the pleasantest habitations I have ever known is an old white house, built at right angles, with the pointed roofs and clustered chimneys of Elizabeth's day, covered with roses, vines, and passion-flowers, and parted by a green sloping meadow from a straggling picturesque village street. In this charming abode resides a more charming family: a gentleman,

“ Polite as all his life in courts had been,
And good as he the world had never seen;”

two daughters full of sweetness and talent; and aunt Martha—the most delightful of old maids! She has another appellation, I suppose,—she must have one;—but I scarcely know it: Aunt Martha is the name that belongs to her—the name of affection. Such is the universal feeling which she inspires, that all her friends, all her acquaintances, (in this case the terms are almost synonymous,) speak of her like her own family:—she

is every body's Aunt Martha—and a very charming Aunt Martha she is.

First of all, she is, as all women should be if they can, remarkably handsome. She may be—it is a delicate matter to speak of a lady's age!—she must be five-and-forty; but few beauties of twenty could stand a comparison with her loveliness. It is such a fulness of bloom, so luxuriant, so satiating; just tall enough to carry off the plumpness which at forty-five is so becoming; a brilliant complexion; curled pouting lips; long, clear, bright grey eyes—the colour for expression, that which unites the quickness of the black with the softness of the blue; a Roman regularity of feature; and a profusion of rich brown hair.—Such is Aunt Martha. Add to this a very gentle and pleasant speech, always kind, and generally lively; the sweetest temper; the easiest manners; a singular rectitude and singleness of mind; a perfect open-heartedness; and a total unconsciousness of all these charms; and you will wonder a little that she is Aunt Martha still. I have heard hints of an early engagement broken by the fickleness of man;—and there is about her an aversion to love in one particular direction—the love matrimonial—and an overflowing of affection in all other channels, that seems as if the natural course of the stream had been violently dammed up. She has many lovers—admirers I should say,—for there is, amidst her

good-humoured gaiety, a coyness that forbids their going farther; a modesty almost amounting to shyness, that checks even the laughing girls, who sometimes accuse her of stealing away their beaux. I do not think any man on earth could tempt her into wedlock;—it would be a most unpardonable monopoly if any one should; an intolerable engrossing of a general blessing; a theft from the whole community.

Her usual home is the white house covered with roses; and her station in the family is rather doubtful. She is not the mistress, for her charming nieces are old enough to take and to adorn the head of the table; nor the housekeeper, though, as she is the only lady of the establishment who wears pockets, those ensigns of authority the keys will sometimes be found, with other strays, in that goodly receptacle; nor a guest; her spirit is too active for that lazy post; her real vocation there, and every where, seems to be comforting, cheering, welcoming, and spoiling every thing that comes in her way; and, above all, nursing and taking care. Of all kind employments, these are her favourites. Oh the shawlings, the cloakings, the cloggings! the cautions against cold, or heat, or rain, or sun! the remedies for diseases not arrived! colds uncaught! incipient tooth-aches! rheumatisms to come! She loves nursing so well, that we used to accuse her of inventing maladies for other people, that she might have the pleasure

of curing them ; and when they really come—as come they will sometimes in spite of Aunt Martha—what a nurse she is ! It is worth while to be a little sick to be so attended. All the cousins, and cousins' cousins of her connexion, as regularly send for her on the occasion of a lying-in, as for the midwife. I suppose she has undergone the ceremony of dandling the baby, sitting up with the new mama, and dispensing the caudle, twenty times at least. She is equally important at weddings or funerals. Her humanity is inexhaustible. She has an intense feeling of fellowship with her kind, and grieves or rejoices in the sufferings or happiness of others with a reality as genuine as it is rare.

Her accomplishments are exactly of this sympathetic order ; all calculated to administer much to the pleasure of her companions, and nothing to her own importance or vanity. She leaves to the sirens, her nieces, the higher enchantments of the piano, the harp, and the guitar, and that noblest of instruments, the human voice ; ambitious of no other musical fame than such as belongs to the playing of quadrilles and waltzes for their little dances, in which she is indefatigable : she neither caricatures the face of man nor of nature under pretence of drawing figures or landscapes ; but she ornaments the reticules, bell-ropes, ottomans, and chair-covers of all her acquaintance, with flowers as rich and luxuriant as her own beauty. She draws patterns for the igno-

rant, and works flounces, frills, and baby-linen, for the idle; she reads aloud to the sick, plays at cards with the old, and loses at chess to the unhappy. Her gift in gossiping, too, is extraordinary; she is a gentle newsmonger, and turns her scandal on the sunny side. But she is an old maid still; and certain small peculiarities hang about her. She is a thorough hoarder: whatever fashion comes up, she is sure to have something of the sort by her—or, at least, something thereunto convertible. She is a little superstitious; sees strangers in her tea-cup, gifts in her finger-nails, letters and winding-sheets in the candle, and purses and coffins in the fire; would not spill the salt “for all the worlds that one ever has to give;” and looks with dismay on a crossed knife and fork. Moreover, she is orderly to fidgetiness;—that is her greatest calamity!—for young ladies now-a-days are not quite so tidy as they should be,—and ladies’ maids are much worse; and drawers are tumbled, and drawing-rooms in a litter. Happy she to whom a disarranged drawer can be a misery! Dear and happy Aunt Martha!

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

THE VISIT.

OCTOBER 27th.—A lovely autumnal day; the air soft, balmy, genial; the sky of that softened and delicate blue upon which the eye loves to rest,—the blue which gives such relief to the rich beauty of the earth, all around glowing in the ripe and mellow tints of the most gorgeous of the seasons. Really such an autumn may well compensate our English climate for the fine spring of the south, that spring of which the poets talk, but which we so seldom enjoy. Such an autumn glows upon us like a splendid evening; it is the very sunset of the year; and I have been tempted forth into a wider range of enjoyment than usual. This *walk* (if I may use the Irish figure of speech called a bull) will be a *ride*. A very dear friend has beguiled me into accompanying her in her pretty equipage to her beautiful home, four miles off; and having sent forward in the

style of a running footman the servant who had driven her, she assumes the reins, and off we set.

My fair companion is a person whom nature and fortune would have spoiled if they could. She is one of those striking women whom a stranger cannot pass without turning to look again; tall and finely proportioned, with a bold Roman contour of figure and feature, a delicate English complexion, and an air of distinction altogether her own. Her beauty is duchess-like. She seems born to wear feathers and diamonds, and to form the grace and ornament of a court; and the noble frankness and simplicity of her countenance and manner confirm the impression. Destiny has, however, dealt more kindly by her. She is the wife of a rich country gentleman of high descent and higher attainments, to whom she is most devotedly attached,—the mother of a little girl as lovely as herself, and the delight of all who have the happiness of her acquaintance, to whom she is endeared not merely by her remarkable sweetness of temper and kindness of heart, but by the singular ingenuousness and openness of character which communicate an indescribable charm to her conversation. She is as transparent as water. You may see every colour, every shade of a mind as lofty and beautiful as her person. Talking with her is like being in the Palace of Truth described by Madame de Genlis;

and yet so kindly are her feelings, so great her indulgence to the little failings and foibles of our common nature, so intense her sympathy with the wants, the wishes, the sorrows, and the happiness of her fellow-creatures, that, with all her frank speaking, I never knew her make an enemy or lose a friend.

But we must get on. What would she say if she knew I was putting her into print? We must get on up the hill. Ah! that is precisely what we are not likely to do! This horse, this beautiful and high-bred horse, well fed, and fat and glossy, who stood prancing at our gate like an Arabian, has suddenly turned sulky. He does not indeed stand quite still, but his way of moving is little better,—the slowest and most sullen of all walks. Even they who ply the hearse at funerals, sad-looking beasts who totter under black feathers, go faster. It is of no use to admonish him by whip, or rein, or word. The rogue has found out, that it is a weak and tender hand that guides him now. Oh for one pull, one stroke of his old driver the groom! How he would fly! But there is the groom half a mile before us, out of ear-shot, clearing the ground at a capital rate, beating us hollow. He has just turned the top of the hill;—and in a moment—aye, *now* he is out of sight, and will undoubtedly so continue till he meets us at the lawn gate. Well! there is no great harm. It is only prolonging the pleasure of enjoying together this

charming scenery in this fine weather. If once we make up our minds not to care how slowly our steed goes, not to fret ourselves by vain exertions, it is no matter what his pace may be. There is little doubt of his getting home by sunset, and that will content us. He is, after all, a fine noble animal; and perhaps when he finds that we are determined to give him his way, he may relent, and give us ours. All of his sex are sticklers for dominion, though, when it is undisputed, some of them are generous enough to abandon it. Two or three of the most discreet wives of my acquaintance contrive to manage their husbands sufficiently with no better secret than this seeming submission; and in our case the example has the more weight since we have no possible way of helping ourselves.

Thus philosophising, we reached the top of the hill, and viewed with "reverted eyes" the beautiful prospect that lay bathed in golden sunshine behind us. Cowper says, with that boldness of expressing in poetry the commonest and simplest feelings, which is perhaps one great secret of his originality,

" Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily seen,
Please daily, and whose novelty survives
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years."

Every day I walk up this hill—every day I pause at the top to admire the broad winding road with the green

waste on each side, uniting it with the thickly timbered hedgerows; the two pretty cottages at unequal distances, placed so as to mark the bends; the village beyond, with its mass of roofs and clustered chimneys peeping through the trees; and the rich distance, where cottages, mansions, churches, towns, seem embowered in some wide forest, and shut in by blue shadowy hills. Every day I admire this most beautiful landscape; yet never did it seem to me so fine or so glowing as now. All the tints of the glorious autumn, orange, tawny, yellow, red, are poured in profusion amongst the bright greens of the meadows and turnip fields, till the eye is satiated with colour; and then before us we have the common with its picturesque roughness of surface, tufted with cottages, dappled with water, edging off on one side into fields and farms and orchards, and terminated on the other by the princely oak avenue. What a richness and variety the wild broken ground gives to the luxuriant cultivation of the rest of the landscape! Cowper has described it for me. How perpetually, as we walk in the country, his vivid pictures recur to the memory! Here is his common, and mine!

“ The common overgrown with fern, and rough
With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deform’d
And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,
And decks itself with ornaments of gold;—

there the turf
 Smells fresh, and, rich in odoriferous herbs
 And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense
 With luxury of unexpected sweets."

The description is exact. There, too, to the left is my cricket-ground; (Cowper's common wanted that finishing grace;) and there stands one solitary urchin, as if in contemplation of its past and future glories; for, alas! cricket is over for the season. Ah! it is Ben Kirby, next brother to Joe, king of the youngsters, and probably his successor—for this Michaelmas has cost us Joe! He is promoted from the farm to the mansion-house, two miles off; there he cleans shoes, rubs knives, and runs upon errands, and is, as his mother expresses it, "a sort of 'prentice to the footman." I should not wonder if Joe, some day or other, should overtop the footman, and rise to be butler; and his splendid prospects must be our consolation for the loss of this great favourite. In the mean time we have Ben.

Ben Kirby is a year younger than Joe, and the schoolfellow and rival of Jem Eusden. To be sure his abilities lie in rather a different line: Jem is a scholar, Ben is a wag: Jem is great in figures and writing, Ben in faces and mischief. His master says of him, that, if there were two such in the school, he must resign his

office ; and, as far as my observation goes, the worthy pedagogue is right. Ben is, it must be confessed, a great corrupter of gravity. He hath an exceeding aversion to authority and decorum, and a wonderful boldness and dexterity in overthrowing the one and puzzling the other. His contortions of visage are astounding. His " power over his own muscles and those of other people " is almost equal to that of Liston ; and indeed the original face, flat and square and Chinese in its shape, of a fine tan complexion, with a snub nose, and a slit for a mouth, is nearly as comical as that matchless performer's. When aided by Ben's singular mobility of feature, his knowing winks and grins and shrugs and nods, together with a certain dry shrewdness, a habit of saying sharp things, and a marvellous gift of impudence, it forms as fine a specimen as possible of a humorous country boy, an oddity in embryo. Every body likes Ben, except his butts ; (which may perhaps comprise half his acquaintance ;) and of them no one so thoroughly hates and dreads him as our parish schoolmaster, a most worthy King Log, whom Ben dumb-founds twenty times a day. He is a great ornament of the cricket-ground, has a real genius for the game, and displays it after a very original manner under the disguise of awkwardness—as the clown shows off his agility in a pantomime. Nothing comes amiss to him. By the bye, he would have been the very lad for us in

our present dilemma; not a horse in England could master Ben Kirby. But we are too far from him now—and perhaps it is as well that we are so. I believe the rogue has a kindness for me, in remembrance of certain apples and nuts, which my usual companion, who delights in his wit, is accustomed to dole out to him. But it is a Robin Goodfellow nevertheless, a perfect Puck, that loves nothing on earth so well as mischief. Perhaps the horse may be the safer conductor of the two.

The avenue is quite alive to-day. Old women are picking up twigs and acorns, and pigs of all sizes doing their utmost to spare them the latter part of the trouble; boys and girls groping for beech-nuts under yonder clump; and a group of younger elves collecting as many dead leaves as they can find to feed the bonfire which is smoking away so briskly amongst the trees,—a sort of rehearsal of the grand bonfire nine days hence; of the loyal conflagration of the arch traitor Guy Vaux, which is annually solemnised in the avenue, accompanied with as much of squibbery and crackery as our boys can beg or borrow—not to say steal. Ben Kirby is a great man on the fifth of November. All the savings of a month, the hoarded halfpence, the new farthings, the very luck-penny, go off *in fumo* on that night. For my part I like this daylight mockery better. There is no gunpowder—odious

(gunpowder! no noise but the merry shouts of the small fry, so shrill and happy, and the cawing of the rooks, who are wheeling in large circles overhead, and wondering what is going forward in their territory—seeming in their loud clamour to ask what that light smoke may mean that curls so prettily amongst their old oaks, towering as if to meet the clouds. There is something very intelligent in the ways of that black people the rooks, particularly in their wonder. I suppose it results from their numbers and their unity of purpose, a sort of collective and corporate wisdom. Yet geese congregate also; and geese never by any chance look wise. But then geese are a domestic fowl; we have spoiled them; and rooks are free commoners of nature, who use the habitations we provide for them, tenant our groves and our avenues, and never dream of becoming our subjects.

What a labyrinth of a road this is! I do think there are four turnings in the short half-mile between the avenue and the mill. And what a pity, as my companion observes—not that our good and jolly miller, the very representative of the old English yeomanry, should be so rich, but that one consequence of his riches should be the pulling-down of the prettiest old mill that ever looked at itself in the Loddon, with the picturesque low-browed irregular cottage, which stood with its light-pointed roof, its clustered chim-

neys, and its ever-open door, looking like the real abode of comfort and hospitality, to build this huge, staring, frightful, red-brick mill, as ugly as a manufactory, and this great square house, ugly and red to match, just behind. The old building always used to remind me of Woollett's beautiful engraving of a scene in the Maid of the Mill. It will be long before any artist will make a drawing of this. Only think of this redness in a picture! this boiled lobster of a house! Falstaff's description of Bardolph's nose would look pale in the comparison.

Here is that monstrous machine of a tilted waggon, with its load of flour, and its four fat horses. I wonder whether our horse will have the decency to get out of the way. If he does not, I am sure we cannot make him; and that enormous ship upon wheels, that ark on dry land, would roll over us like the car of Jaggernaut. Really—Oh no! there is no danger now. I should have remembered that it is my friend Samuel Long who drives the mill-team. He will take care of us. "Thank you, Samuel!" And Samuel has put us on our way, steered us safely past his waggon, escorted us over the bridge; and now, having seen us through our immediate difficulties, has parted from us with a very civil bow and good-humoured smile, as one who is always civil and good-humoured, but with a certain triumphant masterful look in his eyes, which I have

noted in men, even the best of them, when a woman gets into straits by attempting manly employments. He has done us great good though, and may be allowed his little feeling of superiority. The parting salute he bestowed on our steed, in the shape of an astounding crack of his huge whip, has put that refractory animal on his mettle. On we go fast! past the glazier's pretty house, with its porch and its filberd walk; along the narrow lane bordered with elms, whose fallen leaves have made the road one yellow; past that little farm-house with the horse-chestnut trees before, glowing like oranges; past the white-washed school on the other side, gay with October roses; past the park, and the lodge, and the mansion, where once dwelt the great earl of Clarendon;—and now the rascal has begun to discover that Samuel Long and his whip are a mile off, and that his mistress is driving him, and he slackens his pace accordingly. Perhaps he feels the beauty of the road just here, and goes slowly to enjoy it. Very beautiful it certainly is. The park paling forms the boundary on one side, with fine clumps of oak, and deer in all attitudes; the water, tufted with alders, flowing along on the other. Another turn, and the water winds away, succeeded by a low hedge, and a sweep of green meadows; whilst the park and its paling are replaced by a steep bank, on which stands a small, quiet, village ale-house; and

higher up, enbosomed in wood, is the little country church, with its sloping church-yard and its low white steeple, peeping out from amongst magnificent yew-trees :

“ Huge trunks ! and each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwined fibres serpentine
Up-coiling, and invet'rately convolved.”

WORDSWORTH.

No village-church was ever more happily placed. It is the very image of the peace and humbleness inculcated within its walls.

Ah ! here is a higher hill rising before us, almost like a mountain. How grandly the view opens as we ascend over that wild bank, overgrown with fern, and heath, and gorse, and between those tall hollies, glowing with their coral berries ! What an expanse ! But we have little time to gaze at present ; for that piece of perversity, our horse, who has walked over so much level ground, has now, inspired, I presume, by a desire to revisit his stable, taken it into that unaccountable noddle of his to trot up this, the very steepest hill in the county. Here we are on the top ; and in five minutes we have reached the lawn gate, and are in the very midst of that beautiful piece of art or nature (I do not know to which class it belongs), the pleasure-ground of F. Hill. Never was the “ prophetic eye of

taste" exerted with more magical skill than in these plantations. Thirty years ago this place had no existence ; it was a mere undistinguished tract of field and meadow and common land ; now it is a mimic forest, delighting the eye with the finest combinations of trees and shrubs, the rarest effects of form and foliage, and bewildering the mind with its green glades, and impervious recesses, and apparently interminable extent. It is the triumph of landscape gardening, and never more beautiful than in this autumn sunset, lighting up the ruddy beech and the spotted sycamore, and gilding the shining fir-cones that hang so thickly amongst the dark pines. The robins are singing around us, as if they too felt the magic of the hour. How gracefully the road winds through the leafy labyrinth, leading imperceptibly to the more ornamented sweep. Here we are at the door amidst geraniums, and carnations, and jasmines, still in flower. Ah ! here is a flower sweeter than all, a bird gayer than the robin, the little bird that chirps to the tune of "mama ! mama !" the bright-faced fairy, whose tiny feet come pattering along, making a merry music, mama's own Frances ! And following her guidance, here we are in the dear round room time enough to catch the last rays of the sun, as they light the noble landscape which lies like a panorama around us, lin-

gering longest on that long island of old thorns and stunted oaks, the oasis of B. Heath, and then vanishing in a succession of gorgeous clouds.

October 28.—Another soft and brilliant morning. But the pleasures of to-day must be written in shorthand. I have left myself no room for notes of admiration.

First we drove about the coppice; an extensive wood of oak, and elm, and beech, chiefly the former, which adjoins the park paling of F. Hill, of which demesne, indeed, it forms one of the most delightful parts. The roads through the coppice are studiously wild, so that they have the appearance of mere cart-tracks: and the manner in which the ground is tumbled about, the steep declivities, the sunny slopes, the sudden swells and falls, now a close narrow valley, then a sharp ascent to an eminence, commanding an immense extent of prospect, have a striking air of natural beauty, developed and heightened by the perfection of art. All this, indeed, was familiar to me; the colouring only was new. I had been there in early spring, when the fragrant palms were on the willow, and the yellow tassels on the hazel, and every twig was swelling with renewed life; and I had been there again and again in the green leafiness of midsummer; but never as now, when the dark verdure of the fir-plantations,

hanging over the picturesque and unequal paling, partly covered with moss and ivy, contrasts so remarkably with the shining orange-leaves of the beech, already half fallen, the pale yellow of the scattering elm, the deeper and richer tints of the oak, and the glossy stems of the "lady of the woods," the delicate weeping birch. The underwood is no less picturesque. The red-spotted leaves, and redder berries of the old thorns, the scarlet festoons of the bramble, the tall fern of every hue, seem to vie with the brilliant mosaic of the ground, now covered with dead leaves, and strewn with fir-cones, now, where a little glade intervenes, gay with various mosses and splendid *fungi*. How beautiful is this coppice to-day! especially where the little spring, as clear as crystal, comes bubbling out from the "old fantastic" beech root, and trickles over the grass, bright and silent as the dew in a May morning. The wood pigeons (who are just returned from their summer migration, and are cropping the ivy berries) add their low cooings, the very note of love, to the slight fluttering of the fallen leaves in the quiet air, giving a voice to the sunshine and the beauty. This coppice is a place to live and die in. But we must go. And how fine is the ascent which leads us again into the world, past those cottages hidden as in a pit, and by that hanging orchard and that rough

heathy bank ! The scenery in this one spot has a wildness, an abruptness of rise and fall, rare in any part of England, rare above all in this rich and lovely but monotonous county. It is Switzerland in miniature.

And now we cross the hill to pay a morning visit to the family at the great house,—another fine place, commanding another fine sweep of country. The park, studded with old trees, and sinking gently into a valley, rich in wood and water, is in the best style of ornamented landscape, though more according to the common routine of gentlemen's seats than the singularly original place which we have just left. There is, however, one distinctive beauty in the grounds of the great house ;—the magnificent firs which shade the terraces and surround the sweep, giving out in summer odours really Sabæan, and now in this low autumn sun producing an effect almost magical, as the huge red trunks, garlanded with ivy, stand out from the deep shadows like an army of giants. In-doors—Oh I must not take my readers in-doors, or we shall never get away ! —In-doors the sun-shine is brighter still ; for there, in a lofty lightsome room, sits a damsel fair and arch and *piquante*, one whom Titian or Velasquez should be born again to paint, leaning over an instrument * as

* The dital harp.

sparkling and fanciful as herself, singing pretty French romances, and Scotch Jacobite songs, and all sorts of graceful and airy drolleries picked up I know not where—an English improvvisatrice! a gayer Annot Lyle! whilst her sister, of a higher order of beauty, and with an earnest kindness in her smile that deepens its power, lends to the piano, as her father to the violin, an expression, a sensibility, a spirit, an eloquence, almost human—almost divine! Oh to hear these two instruments accompanying my dear companion (I forgot to say that she is a singer worthy to be so accompanied) in Haydn's exquisite canzonet, "She never told her love,"—to hear her voice, with all its power, its sweetness, its gush of sound, so sustained and assisted by modulations that rivalled its intensity of expression; to hear at once such poetry, such music, such execution, is a pleasure never to be forgotten, or mixed with meaner things. I seem to hear it still.

As in the bursting spring-time o'er the eye
 Of one who haunts the fields fair visions creep
 Beneath the closed lids (afore dull sleep
 Dims the quick fancy) of sweet flowers that lie
 On grassy banks, oxslip of orient dye,
 And palest primrose and blue violet,
 All in their fresh and dewy beauty set,
 Pictur'd within the sense, and will not fly :

So in mine ear resounds and lives again
One mingled melody,—a voice, a pair
Of instruments most voice-like ! Of the air
Rather than of the earth seems that high strain,
A spirit's song, and worthy of the train
That sooth'd old Prospero with music rare.

A PARTING GLANCE AT OUR VILLAGE.

It is now eighteen months since our village first sat for its picture, and I cannot say farewell to my courteous readers, without giving them some little intelligence of our goings on, a sort of parting glance at us and our condition. In outward appearance it hath, I suppose, undergone less alteration than any place of its inches in the kingdom. There it stands, the same long straggling street of pretty cottages, divided by pretty gardens, wholly unchanged in size or appearance, unincreased and undiminished by a single brick. To be sure, yesterday evening a slight misfortune happened to our goodly tenement, occasioned by the unlucky diligence mentioned in my first notice, which, under the conduct of a sleepy coachman, and a restive horse, contrived to knock down and demolish the wall of our court, and fairly to drive through the front garden, thereby destroying sundry curious stocks, carnations, and geraniums. It is a mercy that the unruly steed

was content with battering the wall ; for the message itself would come about our ears at the touch of a finger, and really there is one little end-parlour, an after-thought of the original builder, which stands so temptingly in the way, that I wonder the sagacious quadruped missed it. There was quite din enough without that addition. The three insides (ladies) squalling from the interior of that commodious vehicle ; the outsides (gentlemen) swearing on the roof ; the coachman, still half asleep, but unconsciously blowing his horn ; we in the house screaming and scolding ; the passers-by shouting and hallooing ; and May, who little brooked such an invasion of her territories, barking in her tremendous lion-note, and putting down the other noises like a clap of thunder. But passengers, coachman, horses, and spectators, all righted at last ; and there is no harm done but to my flowers and to the wall. May, however, stands bewailing the ruins, for that low wall was her favourite haunt ; she used to parade backwards and forwards on the top of it, as if to show herself, just after the manner of a peacock on the top of a house ; and would sit or lie for hours on the corner next the gate, basking in the sunshine like a marble statue. Really she has quite the air of one who laments the destruction of personal property ; but the wall is to be rebuilt to-morrow, with old weather-stained bricks—no patchwork ! and

exactly in the same form ; May herself will not find the difference ; so that in the way of alteration this little misfortune will pass for nothing. Neither have we any improvements worth calling such. Except that the wheeler's green door hath been retouched, out of the same pot (as I judge from the tint) with which he furbished up our new-old pony-chaise ; that the shop-window of our neighbour, the universal dealer, hath been beautified, and his name and calling splendidly set forth in yellow letters on a black ground ; and that our landlord of the Rose hath hoisted a new sign of unparalleled splendour ; one side consisting of a full-faced damask rose, of the size and hue of a piony, the other of a maiden-blush in profile, which looks exactly like a carnation, so that both flowers are considerably indebted to the modesty of the " out-of-door artist," who has warily written The Rose under each ;—except these trifling ornaments, which nothing but the jealous eye of a lover could detect, the dear place is altogether unchanged.

The only real improvement with which we have been visited for our sins—(I hate all innovation, whether for better or worse, as if I were a furious Tory, or a woman of three-score and ten)—the only misfortune of that sort which has befallen us, is under foot. The road has been adjusted on the plan of Mr. Mac-Adam ; and a tremendous operation it is. I do

not know what good may ensue ; but for the last six months, some part or other of the highway has been impassable for any feet, except such as are shod by the blacksmith ; and even the four-footed people who wear iron shoes make wry faces, poor things ! at those stones, enemies to man and beast. However, the business is nearly done now ; we are covered with sharp flints every inch of us, except a “bad step” up the hill, which, indeed, looks like a bit cut out of the deserts of Arabia, fitter for camels and caravans than for Christian horses and coaches ; a point which was acknowledged even by our surveyor, a portly gentleman, who, in a smart gig drawn by a prancing steed, was kicking up a prodigious dust at that very moment. He and I ought to be great enemies ; for, besides the Mac-Adamite enormity of the stony road, he hath actually been guilty of tree-murder, having been an accessory before the fact in the death of three limes along the rope-walk—dear sweet innocent limes, that did no harm on earth except shading the path ! I never should have forgiven that offence, had not their removal, by opening a beautiful view from the village up the hill, reconciled even my tree-loving eye to their abstraction. And, to say the truth, though we have had twenty little squabbles, there is no bearing malice with our surveyor ; he is so civil and good-humored, has such a bustling and happy self-importance, such

an honest earnestness in his vocation (which is gratuitous by the by), and such an intense conviction that the state of the turnpike-road, between B. and K., is the principal affair of this life, that I would not undeceive him for more worlds than one ever has to give. How often have I seen him on a cold winter morning, with a face all frost and business, great-coated up to the eyes, driving from post to post, from one gang of labourers to another, praising, scolding, ordering, cheated, laughed at, and liked by them all! Well, when once the hill is finished, we shall have done with him for ever, as he used to tell me by way of consolation, when I shook my head at him, as he went jolting along over his dear new roads, at the imminent risk of his springs and his bones; we shall see no more of him; for the Mac-Adam ways are warranted not to wear out. So be it; I never wish to see a road-mender again.

But if the form of outward things be all unchanged around us, if the dwellings of man remain the same to the sight and the touch, the little world within hath undergone its usual mutations;—the hive is the same, but of the bees some are dead and some are flown away, and some that we left babes and sucklings, insects in the shell, are already putting forth their young wings. Children in our village really sprout up like mushrooms; the air is so promotive of growth, that

the rogues spring into men and women, as if touched by Harlequin's wand, and are quite offended if one happens to say or do any thing which has a reference to their previous condition. My father grievously affronted Sally L., only yesterday, by bestowing upon her a great lump of gingerbread, with which he had stuffed his pockets at a fair. She immediately, as she said, gave it to "the children." Now Sally cannot be above twelve to my certain knowledge, though taller than I am. Lizzy herself is growing womanly. I actually caught that little lady stuck on a chest of drawers, contemplating herself in the glass, and striving with all her might to gather the rich curls that hang about her neck, and turn them under a comb. Well! If Sally and Lizzy live to be old maids, they may probably make the *amende honorable* to time, and wish to be thought young again. In the meanwhile, shall we walk up the street?

The first cottage is that of Mr. H. the patriot, the illuminator, the independent and sturdy yet friendly member of our little state, who, stout and comely, with a handsome chaise-cart, a strong mare, and a neat garden, might have passed for a portrait of that enviable class of Englishmen, who, after a youth of frugal industry, sit down in some retired place to "live upon their means." He and his wife seemed the happiest couple on earth; except a little too much

leisure, I never suspected that they had one trouble or one care. But Care, the witch, will come every where, even to that happiest station, and this prettiest place. She came in one of her most terrific forms—blindness—or (which is perhaps still more tremendous) the faint glimmering light and gradual darkness which precede the total eclipse. For a long time we had missed the pleasant bustling officiousness, the little services, the voluntary tasks, which our good neighbour loved so well. Fruit trees were blighted, and escaped his grand specific, fumigation; wasps multiplied, and their nests remain untraced; the cheerful modest knock with which, just at the very hour when he knew it could be spared, he presented himself to ask for the newspaper, was heard no more; he no longer hung over his gate to way-lay passengers, and entice them into chat; at last he even left off driving his little chaise, and was only seen moping up and down the garden-walk, or stealing gropingly from the wood-pile to the house. He evidently shunned conversation or questions, forbade his wife to tell what ailed him, and even when he put a green shade over his darkened eyes, fled from human sympathy with a stern pride that seemed almost ashamed of the humbling infirmity. That strange (but to a vigorous and healthy man perhaps natural) feeling soon softened. The disease increased hourly, and he became depen-

dent on his excellent wife for every comfort and relief. She had many willing assistants in her labour of love ; all his neighbours strove to return, according to their several means, the kindness which all had received from him in some shape or other. The country boys, to whose service he had devôted so much time, in shaping bats, constructing bows and arrows, and other quips and trickeries of the same nature, vied with each other in performing little offices about the yard and stable ; and John Evans, the half-witted gardener, to whom he had been a constant friend, repaid his goodness by the most unwearied attention. Gratitude even seemed to sharpen poor John's perceptions and faculties. There is an old man in our parish work-house, who occasionally walks through the street, led by a little boy holding the end of a long stick. The idea of this man, who had lived in utter blindness for thirty years, was always singularly distressing to Mr. H. I shall never forget the address with which our simple gardener used to try to divert his attention from this miserable fellow-sufferer. He would get between them to prevent the possibility of recognition by the dim and uncertain vision ; would talk loudly to drown the peculiar noise, the sort of duet of feet, caused by the quick short steps of the child, and the slow irregular tread of the old man ; and, if any one ventured to allude to

blind Robert, he would turn the conversation with an adroitness and acuteness which might put to shame the proudest intellect. So passed many months. At last Mr. H. was persuaded to consult a celebrated oculist, and the result was most comforting. The disease was ascertained to be a cataract; and now with the increase of darkness came an increase of hope. The film spread, thickened, ripened, speedily and healthily; and to-day the requisite operation has been performed with equal skill and success. You may still see some of the country boys lingering round the gate with looks of strong and wondering interest; poor John is going to and fro, he knows not for what, unable to rest a moment; Mrs. H., too, is walking in the garden, shedding tears of thankfulness; and he who came to support their spirit, the stout strong-hearted farmer A., seems trembling and overcome. The most tranquil person in the house is probably the patient: he bore the operation with resolute firmness, and *he has seen again*. Think of the bliss bound up in those four words! He is in darkness now, and must remain so for some weeks; but he has seen, and he will see; and that humble cottage is again a happy dwelling.

Next we come to the shoemaker's abode. All is unchanged there, except that its master becomes more industrious and more pale-faced, and that his fair

daughter is a notable exemplification of the development which I have already noticed amongst our young things. But she is in the real transition state, just emerging from the chrysalis, and the eighteen months, between fourteen and a half and sixteen, would metamorphose a child into a woman all the world over. She is still pretty, but not so elegant as when she wore frocks and pinafores, and, unconsciously classical, parted her long brown locks in the middle of her forehead, and twisted them up in a knot behind, giving to her finely-shaped head and throat the air of a Grecian statue. Then she was stirring all day in her small housewifery, or her busy idleness, delving and digging in her flower-border, tossing and dandling every infant that came within her reach, feeding pigs and poultry, playing with May, and prattling with an open-hearted frankness to the country lads, who assemble at evening in the shop to enjoy a little gentle gossiping; for be it known to my London readers, that the shoemaker's in a country village is now what (according to tradition, and the old novels) the barber's used to be, the resort of all the male newsmongers, especially the young. Then she talked to these visitors gaily and openly, sang and laughed and ran in and out, and took no more thought of a young man than of a gosling. Then she was only fourteen. Now she wears gowns and aprons,—puts her hair in paper,

—has left off singing, talks,—has left off running, walks,—nurses the infants with a grave solemn grace,—has entirely cut her former playmate Mayflower, who tosses her pretty head as much as to say—who cares?—and has nearly renounced all acquaintance with the visitors of the shop, who are by no means disposed to take matters so quietly. There she stands on the threshold, shy and demure, just vouchsafing a formal nod or a faint smile as they pass, and, if she in her turn be compelled to pass the open door of their news-room (for the working apartment is separate from the house), edging along as slyly and mincingly as if there were no such beings as young men in the world. Exquisite coquette! I think (she is my opposite neighbour, and I have a right to watch her doings,—the right of retaliation), there is one youth particularly distinguished by her non-notice, one whom she never will see or speak to, who stands a very fair chance to carry her off. He is called Jem Tanner, and is a fine lad, with an open ruddy countenance, a clear blue eye, and curling hair of that tint which the poets are pleased to denominate golden. Though not one of our eleven, he was a promising cricketer. We have missed him lately on the green at the Sunday-evening game, and I find on inquiry that he now frequents a chapel about a mile off, where he is the best male singer, as our nymph of the shoe-shop is incom-

parably the first female. I am not fond of betting ; but I would venture the lowest stake of gentility, a silver three-pence, that, before the winter ends, a wedding will be the result of these weekly meetings at the chapel. In the long dark evenings, when the father has enough to do in piloting the mother with conjugal gallantry through the dirty lanes, think of the opportunity that Jem will have to escort the daughter. A little difficulty he may have to encounter : the lass will be coy for a while ; the mother will talk of their youth, the father of their finances ; but the marriage, I doubt not, will ensue.

Next in order, on the other side of the street, is the blacksmith's house. Change has been busy here in a different and more awful form. Our sometime constable, the tipsiest of parish officers, of blacksmiths and of men, is dead. Returning from a revel with a companion as full of beer as himself, one or the other, or both, contrived to overset the cart in a ditch ; (the living scapegrace is pleased to lay the blame of the mishap on the horse, but that is contrary to all probability, this respectable quadruped being a water-drinker ;) and inward bruises, acting on inflamed blood and an impaired constitution, carried him off in a very short time, leaving an ailing wife and eight children, the eldest of whom is only fourteen years of age. This sounds like a very tragical story ; yet, perhaps, be-

cause the loss of a drunken husband is not quite so great a calamity as the loss of a sober one, the effect of this event is not altogether so melancholy as might be expected. The widow, when she was a wife, had a complaining broken-spirited air, a peevish manner, a whining voice, a dismal countenance, and a person so neglected and slovenly, that it was difficult to believe that she had once been remarkably handsome. She is now quite another woman. The very first Sunday she put on her weeds, we all observed how tidy and comfortable she looked, how much her countenance, in spite of a decent show of tears, was improved, and how completely through all her sighings her tone had lost its peevishness. I have never seen her out of spirits or out of humour since. She talks and laughs and bustles about, managing her journeymen and scolding her children as notably as any dame in the parish. The very house looks more cheerful; she has cut down the old willow-trees that stood in the court, and let in the light; and now the sun glances brightly from the casement windows, and plays amidst the vine-leaves and the clusters of grapes which cover the walls; the door is newly painted, and shines like the face of its mistress; even the forge has lost half its dinginess. Every thing smiles. She indeed talks by fits of "poor George," especially when any allusion to her old enemy mine host of the Rose brings the deceased to her me-

mory ; then she bewails (as is proper) her dear husband and her desolate condition ; calls herself a lone widow ; sighs over her eight children ; complains of the troubles of business, and tries to persuade herself and others that she is as wretched as a good wife ought to be. But this will not do. She is a happier woman than she has been any time these fifteen years, and she knows it. My dear village-husbands, if you have a mind that your wives should be really sorry when you die, whether by a fall from a cart or otherwise, keep from the alehouse !

Next comes the tall thin red house, that ought to boast genteeler inmates than its short fat mistress, its children, its pigs, and its quantity of noise, happiness, and vulgarity. The din is greater than ever. The husband, a merry jolly tar, with a voice that sounds as if issuing from a speaking trumpet, is returned from a voyage to India ; and another little one, a chubby roaring boy, has added his lusty cries to the family concert.

This door, blockaded by huge bales of goods, and half darkened by that moving mountain, the tilted waggon of the S. mill which stands before it, belongs to the village shop. Increase has been here too in every shape. Within fourteen months two little pretty quiet girls have come into the world. Before Fanny could well manage to totter across the road to her good

friend the nymph of the shoe-shop, Margaret made her appearance; and poor Fanny, discarded at once from the maid's arms and her mother's knee, degraded from the rank and privileges of "the baby," (for at that age precedence is strangely reversed,) would have had a premature foretaste of the instability of human felicity, had she not taken refuge with that best of nurses, a fond father. Every thing thrives about the shop, from the rosy children to the neat maid and the smart apprentice. No room now for lodgers, and no need! The young mantua-making schoolmistresses, the old inmates, are gone; one of them not very far. She grew tired of scolding little boys and girls about their A, B, C, and of being scolded in her turn by their sisters and mothers about pelisses and gowns; so she gave up both trades almost a year ago, and has been ever since our pretty Harriet. I do not think she has ever repented of the exchange, though it might not perhaps have been made so soon, had not her elder sister, who had been long engaged to an attendant at one of the colleges of Oxford, thought herself on the point of marriage just as our housemaid left us. Poor Betsy! She had shared the fate of many a prouder maiden, wearing out her youth in expectation of the promotion that was to authorise her union with the man of her heart. Many a year had she waited in smiling constancy, fond of William in no common measure, and proud of him, as

well she might be ; for, when the vacation so far lessened his duties as to render a short absence practicable, and he stole up here for a few days to enjoy her company, it was difficult to distinguish him in air and manner, as he sauntered about in elegant indolence with his fishing-rod and his flute, from the young-Oxonians his masters. At last promotion came ; and Betsy, apprised of it by an affectionate and congratulatory letter from his sister, prepared her wedding-clothes, and looked hourly for the bridegroom. No bridegroom came. A second letter announced, with regret and indignation, that William had made another choice, and was to be married early in the ensuing month. Poor Betsy ! We were alarmed for her health, almost for her life. She wept incessantly, took no food, wandered recklessly about from morning till night, lost her natural rest, her flesh, her colour ; and in less than a week she was so altered, that no one would have known her. Consolation and remonstrance were alike rejected, till at last Harriet happened to strike the right chord by telling her that “ she wondered at her want of spirit.” This was touching her on the point of honour ; she had always been remarkably high-spirited, and could as little brook the imputation as a soldier or a gentleman. This lucky suggestion gave an immediate turn to her feelings ; anger and scorn succeeded to grief ; she wiped her eyes, “ hemmed away a sigh,”

and began to scold most manfully. She did still better. She recalled an old admirer, who in spite of repeated rejections had remained constant in his attachment, and made such good speed, that she was actually married the day before her faithless lover, and is now the happy wife of a very respectable tradesman.

Ah! the in-and-out cottage! the dear, dear home! No weddings there! No changes! except that the white kitten, who sits purring at the window under the great myrtle, has succeeded to his lamented grandfather, our beautiful Persian cat, I cannot find one alteration to talk about. The wall of the court indeed—but that will be mended to-morrow.

Here is the new sign, the well-frequented Rose inn! Plenty of changes there! Our landlord is always improving, if it be only a pig-sty or a watering-trough—plenty of changes and one splendid wedding. Miss Phœbe is married, not to her old lover the recruiting sergeant (for he had one wife already; probably more,) but to a patten-maker, as errant a dandy as ever wore mustachios. How Phœbe could “abase her eyes” from the stately sergeant to this youth, half a foot shorter than herself, whose “waist would go into any alderman’s thumb-ring,” might, if the final choice of a coquette had ever been matter of wonder, have occasioned some speculation. But our patten-maker is a man of spirit; and the wedding was of extraordinary splen-

dour. Three gigs, each containing four persons, graced the procession, beside numerous carts and innumerable pedestrians. The bride was equipped in muslin and satin, and really looked very pretty with her black sparkling eyes, her clear brown complexion, her blushes and her smiles; the bride-maidens were only less smart than the bride; and the bridegroom was "point device in his accoutrements," and as munificent as a nabob. Cake flew about the village; plum-puddings were abundant; and strong beer, aye, even mine host's best double X, was profusely distributed. There was all manner of eating and drinking, with singing, fiddling, and dancing between; and in the evening, to crown all, there was Mr. Moon the conjuror. Think of that stroke of good fortune!—Mr. Moon, the very pearl of all conjurors, who had the honour of puzzling and delighting their late Majesties with his "wonderful and pleasing exhibition of Thaumaturgics, Tachygraphy, mathematical operations, and magical deceptions," happened to arrive about an hour before dinner, and commenced his ingenious deceptions very unintentionally at our house. Calling to apply for permission to perform in the village, being equipped in a gay scarlet coat, and having something smart and sportsman-like in his appearance, he was announced by Harriet as one of the gentlemen of the C. Hunt, and taken (*mistaken I should have said*) by the whole family for a certain captain

newly arrived in the neighbourhood. That misunderstanding, which must, I think, have retaliated on Mr. Moon a little of the puzzlement that he inflicts on others, vanished of course at the production of his bill of fare; and the requested permission was instantly given. Never could he have arrived in a happier hour! Never were spectators more gratified or more scared. All the tricks prospered. The cock crew after his head was cut off; and half-crowns and sovereigns flew about as if winged; the very wedding-ring could not escape Mr. Moon's incantations. We heard of nothing else for a week. From the bridegroom, *un esprit fort*, who defied all manner of conjuration and *diablerie*, down to my Lizzy, whose boundless faith swallows the Arabian Tales, all believed and trembled. So thoroughly were men, women, and children, impressed with the idea of the worthy conjuror's dealings with the devil, that, when he had occasion to go to B., not a soul would give him a cast, from pure awe; and if it had not been for our pony-chaise, poor Mr. Moon must have walked. I hope he is really a prophet; for he foretold all happiness to the new-married pair.

So this pretty white house with the lime-trees before it, which has been under repair for these three years, is on the point of being finished. The vicar has taken it, as the vicarage-house is not yet fit for his reception. He has sent before him a neat modest maid-servant,

whose respectable appearance gives a character to her master and mistress,—a hamper full of flower-roots, sundry boxes of books, a piano-forte, and some simple and useful furniture. Well, we shall certainly have neighbours, and I have a presentiment that we shall find friends.

Lizzy, you may now come along with me round the corner and up the lane, just to the end of the wheeler's shop, and then we shall go home; it is high time. What is this *affiche* in the parlour window? "Apartments to let—inquire within." These are certainly the curate's lodgings—is he going away? Oh I suppose the new vicar will do his own duty—yet, however well he may do it, rich and poor will regret the departure of Mr. B. Well, I hope that he may soon get a good living. "Lodgings to let"—who ever thought of seeing such a placard hereabout? The lodgings, indeed, are very convenient for a single gentleman, "a man and his wife, or two sisters," as the newspapers say—comfortable apartments, neat and tasty withal, with the addition of very civil treatment from the host and hostess. Lodgings to let in our village!

THE END.

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